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PUBLISHERS' NOTE.

The great popularity of Eric Mackay's "Love Letters of a Violinist" has given rise to a demand for a select and attractive edition of his other poetical works. Hence the publication of the present volume, which includes many new lyrics not to be found in any other collection, together with the first published portrait of the Author.

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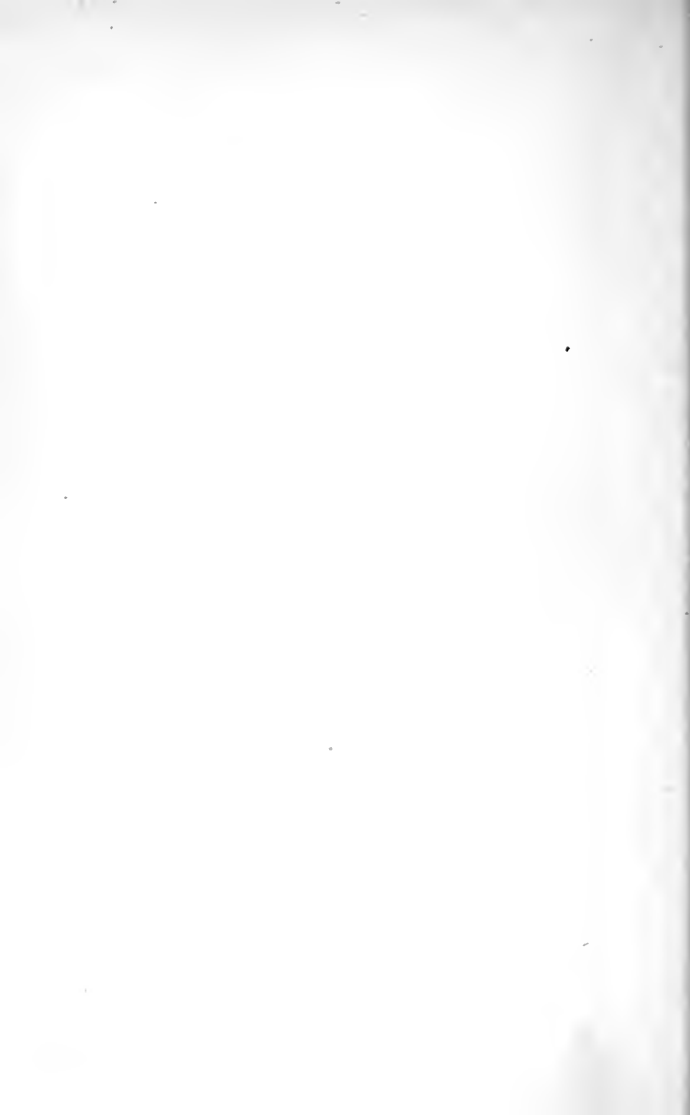
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First Litany.

VIRGO DULCIS.



First Litany.

VIRGO DULCIS.



I.

O THOU refulgent essence of all grace !
O thou that with the witchery of thy face
Hast made of me thy servant unto death,
I pray thee pause, ere, musical of breath,
And rapt of utterance, thou condemn indeed
My venturous wooing, and the wanton speed
 With which I greet thee, dear and tender soul !
From out the fulness of my passion-creed.

II.

I AM so truly thine that nevermore
Shall man be found, this side the Stygian shore,
So meek as I, so patient under blame,
And yet, withal, so minded to proclaim
His lifelong ardour. For my theme is just :
A heart enslaved, a smile, a broken trust,
 A soft mirage, a glimpse of fairyland,
And then the wreck thereof in tears and dust.

III.

THOU wast not made for murder, yet a glance
May murderous prove : and beauty may entrance,
More than a siren's or a serpent's eye.
And there are moments when a smothered sigh
May hint at comfort and a murmured "No"
Give signs of "Yes," and Misery's overflow
Make tears more precious than we care to tell,
Though, one by one, our hopes we must forego.

IV.

I SHOULD have shunned thee as a man may shun
His evil hour. I should have curst the sun
That made the day so bright and earth so fair
When first we met, delirium through the air
Burning like fire ! I should have curst the moon
And all the stars that, dream-like, in a swoon
Shut out the day,—the loved, the lovely day
That came too late and left us all too soon.

V.

I LOOKED at thee, and lo ! from face to feet,
I saw my tyrant, and I felt the beat
Of my quick pulse. I knew thee for a queen,
And bowed submissive ; and the smile serene
Of thy sweet face revealed the soul of thee.
For I was wounded as a man may be
Whom Eros tricks with words he will not prove ;
And all my peace of mind went out from me.

VI.

OH, why didst cheer me with the thought of bliss,
And wouldst not pay me back my luckless kiss?
I sought thy side. I gave thee of my store
One wild salute. A flame was at the core
Of that first kiss ; and on my mouth I feel
The glow thereof, the pressure and the seal,
As if thy nature, when the deed was done,
Had leapt to mine in lightning-like appeal.

VII.

IF debts were paid in full I might require
More than my kiss. I might, in time, aspire
To some new bond, or re-enact the first.
For once, thou know'st, the love for which I thirst,
The love for which I hungered in thy sight,
Was not withheld. I deemed thee, day and night,
Mine own true mate, and sent thee token flowers
To figure forth the hopes I'd fain indite.

VIII.

Is this not so? Canst thou defend, in truth,
The sunlike smile with which, in flush of youth,
Thou didst accept my greeting,—though so late,—
My love-lorn homage when the voice of Fate
Fell from thy lips, and made me twice a man
Because half thine, in that betrothal-plan

Whereof I spake, not knowing how 'twould be
When May had marred the prospects it began?

IX.

CANST thou deny that, early in the spring,
When daisies drooped, and birds were fain to sing,
We met, and talked, and walked, and were content
In sunlit paths? An hour and more we spent
In Keats's Grove. We lingered near the stem
Of that lone tree on which was seen the gem
Of his bright name, there carven by himself;
And then I stooped and kissed thy garment's hem.

X.

I GAVE thee all my life. I gave thee there,
In that wild hour, the great Creator's share
Of mine existence; and I turned to thee
As men to idols, madly on my knee;
And then, uplifted by those arms of thine,
I sat beside thee, warmed with other wine
Than vintage balm; and, mindful of thy blush,
I guessed a thought which words will not define.

XI.

I TOLD thee stories of the days of joy
When earth was young, and love without alloy
Made all things glad and all the thoughts of things.
And like a man who wonders while he sings,
And knows not whence the power that in him lies,
I made a madrigal of all my sighs
And bade thee heed them; and I joined therewith
The texts of these my follies that I prize.

XII.

I SPOKE of men, long dead, who wooed in vain
 And yet were happy,—men whose tender pain
 Was fraught with fervour, as the night with stars.
 And then I spoke of heroes' battle-scars
 And lordly souls who rode from land to land
 To win the love-touch of a lady's hand ;
 And on the strings of thy low-murmuring lute
 I struck the chords that all men understand.

XIII.

I SANG to thee. I praised thee with my praise,
 E'en as a bird, concealed in sylvan ways,
 May laud the rose, and wish, from hour to hour,
 That he had petals like the empress-flower,
 And there could grow, unwinged, and be a bud,
 With all his warblings ta'en at singing-flood
 And turned to vagaries of the wildest scent
 To undermine the meekness in her blood.

XIV.

AH, those were days ! That April should have been
 My last on earth, and, ere the frondage green
 Had changed to gold, I should have joined the ranks
 Of dull dead men who lived for little thanks
 And made the most thereof, though penance-bound.
 I should have known that, in the daily round
 Of mine existence, there are griefs to spare,
 But joys, alas ! too few on any ground.

XV.

AND here I stand to-day with bended head,
My task undone, my garden overspread
With baneful weeds. Am I the lord thereof?
Or mine own slave, without the power to doff
My misery's badge? Am I so weak withal,
That I must loiter, though the bugle's call

Shrills o'er the moor, the far-off weltering moor,
Where foemen meet to vanquish or to fall?

XVI.

AM I so blurred in soul, so out of health,
That I must turn to thee, as if by stealth,
And fear thy censure, fear thy quick rebuff,
And thou so gentle in a world so rough
That God's high priest, the morn-apparelled sun,
Ne'er saw thy like! Am I indeed undone

Of life and love and all? and must I weep
For joys that quit me, and for sands that run?

XVII.

TO-MORROW'S dawn will break; but Yesterday,
Where is its light? And where the breezes' play
That swayed the flowers? A bird will sing again,
But not so well. The wind upon the plain,
The wintry wind, will toss the groaning trees;
But I, what comfort shall I have of these,

To know that they, unloved, have lost the Spring,
As I thy favour and my power to please?

XVIII.

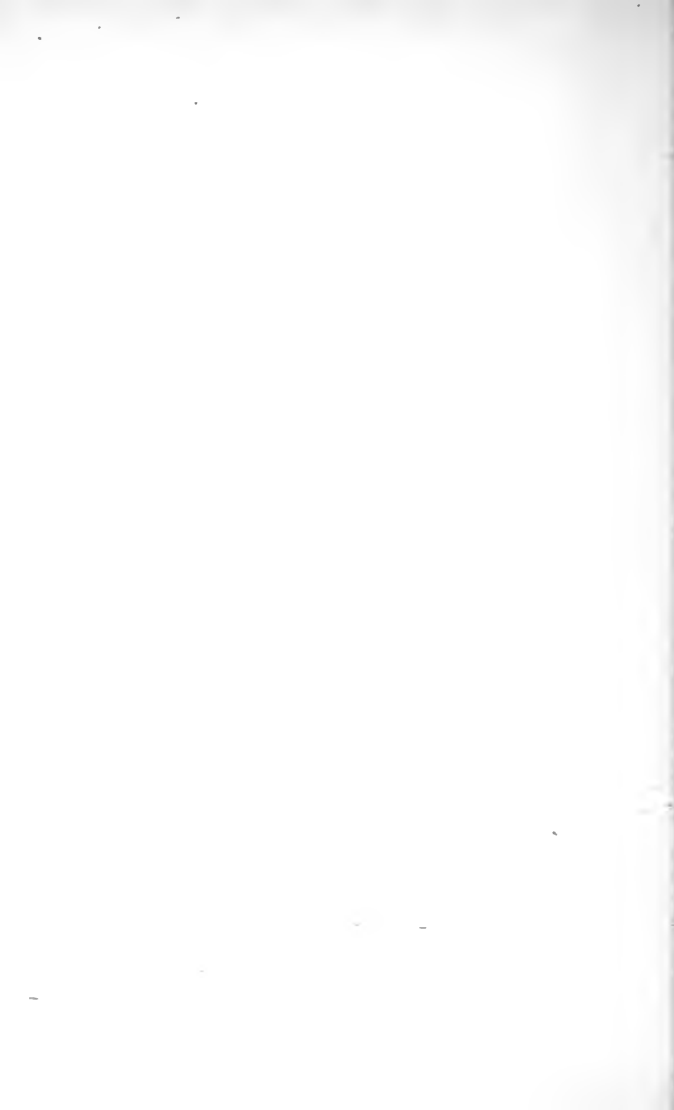
I SHOULD have learnt a lesson from the songs
 Of woodland birds discoursing on the wrongs
 Of madcap moths and bachelor butterflies.
 I should have caught the cadence of the sighs
 Of unwed flowers, and learnt the way to woo,
 Which all things know save I, beneath the blue
 Of Heaven's great dome ; for, undesired of thee,
 I have but jarred the notes that seemed so true.

XIX.

I SHOULD have told thee all I meant to tell,
 And how, at Lammas-tide, a wedding-bell
 Rang through my sleep, mine own as well as thine ;
 And how I led thee, smiling, to a shrine
 And there endowed thee with the name I bear ;
 And how I woke to find the morning-air
 Flooded with light. I should have told thee this,
 And not concealed the theme of my long prayer.

XX.

BUT I was timid. Oh, my love was such
 I scarce could name it ! Trembling over-much
 With too much ardour, I was moved at length
 To mere mad utterance. In a blameful strength
 I seized thy hand, to scare thee, as of old
 Dryads were scared ; and calm and icy-cold
 Thine answer came : " I pray thee, vex me not !"
 And all that day 'twas winter on the wold.



Second Litany.

VOX AMORIS.

Second Litany.

VOX AMORIS.

—O—

I.

VOUCHSAFE, my Lady ! by the passion-flower,
And by the glamour of a moonlit hour,
And by the cries and sighs of all the birds
That sing o' nights, to heed again the words
Of my poor pleading ! For I swear to thee
My love is deeper than the bounding sea,
And more conclusive than a wedding-bell,
And freer-voiced than winds upon the lea.

II.

IN all the world, from east unto the west,
There is no vantage-ground, and little rest,
And no content for me from dawn to dark,
From set of sun to song-time of the lark ;
And yet, withal, there is no man alive
Who for a goodly cause to make it thrive,
Would do such deeds as I would gird me to
Could I but win the pearl for which I dive.

III.

IT is thy love which, downward in the deep
Of far-off visions, I behold in sleep,—
It is thy pearl of love which in the night
Doth tempt my soul to hopes I dare not write,—
It is this gem for which, had I a crown,
I'd barter peace and pomp, and ermined gown ;
 It is thy troth, thou paragon of maids !
For which I'd sell the joys of all renown.

IV.

I WOULD attack a panther in its den
To do thee service as thy man of men,
Or front the Fates, or, like a ghoul, confer
With staring ghosts outside a sepulchre.
I would forego a limb to give thee life,
Or yield my soul itself in any strife,
 In any coil of doubt, in any spot
Where Death and Danger meet as man and wife.

V.

IT is my solace, all my nights and days,
To pray for thee and dote on thee always,
And evermore to count myself a king
Because I earned thy favour in the spring.
Oh, smile on me and call me to thy side,
And I will kneel to thee, as to a bride,
 And yet adore thee as a saint in Heaven
By God ordained, by good men glorified !

VI.

I WILL acquaint thee with mine inmost thought,
 And teach thee all I know, though unbesought,
 And make thee prouder of a poet's dream
 Than wealthy men are proud of what they seem.
 If thou have trust therein, if thou require
 Service of me, or song, or penance dire,
 I will obey thee as thy belted knight,
 Or die to satisfy thy heart's desire. ,

VII.

AH ! thou hast that in store which none can give
 Save thou alone ; and I am fain to live
 To watch the outcome of so fair a gift,—
 To see the bright good morrow loom and lift,
 And know that thou,—unpeered beneath the moon,—
 Untamed of men,—untutored to the tune
 Of lip with lip,—wilt cease thy coy disdain
 And learn the languors of the loves of June.

VIII.

ALL that I am, and all I hope to be,
 Is thine till death ; and though I die for thee
 Each day I live ; and though I throb and thrill
 At thoughts that seem to burn me and to chill
 In my dark hours, I revel in the same ;
 Yet I am free of hope, as thou of blame,
 And all around me, wakeful and in sleep,
 I weave a blessing for thy soul to claim.

IX.

OH, by thy radiant hair and by the glow
Of thy full eyes,—and by thy breast of snow,—
And by the buds thereof that have the flush
Of infant roses when they strive to blush,—
And by thy voice, melodious as a bell
That rings for prayer in God's high citadel,—

By all these things, and more than I can urge,
I charge thee, Sweet ! to let me out of hell !

X.

Is it not Hell to live so far away
And not to touch thee,—not by night or day
To be partaker of one smile of thine,
Or one commingling of thy breath and mine,
Or one encounter of thine amorous mouth ?
I dwell apart from thee, as north from south,
As east from western ways I dwell apart,
And taste the tears that quench not any drouth.

XI.

WHY wouldst thou take the memory of a wrong
To be thy shadow all the summer long,
A thing to chide thee at the dead of night,
A thing to wake thee with the morning light
For self-upbraiding, while the wanton bird
Invests the welkin ? Ah, by joy deferred,—

By peace withheld from me,—do thou relent
And dower my life to-day with one love-word !

XII.

WOULDST thou, Cassandra-wise, oppress my soul
With more unrest, and, Hebe-like, the bowl
Of festal comfort for a moment raise
To my poor lips, and then avert thy gaze?
Wouldst make me mad beyond the daily curse
Of thy displeasure, and in wrath disperse
That halcyon draught, that nectar of the mind,
Which is the theme I yearn to in my verse?

XIII.

OH, by thy pity when so slight a thing
As some small bird is wounded in the wing,
Avert thy scorn, and grant me, from afar,
At least the right to love thee as a star,—
The right to turn to thee, the right to bow
To thy pure name and evermore, as now,
To own thy thralldom and to sing thereon,
In proud allegiance to mine earliest vow.

XIV.

It were abuse of power to frown again
When, all day long, I gloat upon the pain
Of pent-up hope, my joy and my distress,—
While the remembrance of a mute caress
Given to a rose,—a rose I plucked for thee,—
Seems as the withering of the world to me,
Because I am unloved of thee to-day,
And undesired as sea-weeds in the sea.

XV.

I'LL not believe that eyes so bright as thine
Were meant for malice in the summer-shine,
Or that a glance thereof, though changed to fire,
Could injure one whose spirit, like a lyre,
Has throbbed to music of remembered joys,—
The pride thereof, and all the tender poise

Of trust with trust,—the symphonies of grief
Made all mine own,—and Faith which never cloy.

XVI.

How can it be that one so fair as thou
Should wear contention on a whiter brow
Than May-day Dian's in her hunting gear?
I'll not believe that eyes so holy-clear
And mouth so constant to its morning prayer
Could mock the mischief of a man's despair

And all the misery of a moment's hope
Seen far away, as mists are seen in air.

XVII.

How can a woman's heart be made of stone
And she not know it? Mine is overthrown.
I have no heart to-day, no perfect one,
Only a thing that sighs at set of sun
And beats its cage, as if the thrall thereof
Were freedom's prison or the tomb of love;

As if, God help me! there were shame in truth,
And no salvation left in realms above.

XVIII.

I ONCE could laugh, I once was deemed a man
 Fit for the frenzies of the dead god Pan,
 And now, by Heaven ! the birds that sing so well
 Move me to tears ; and all the leafy dell,
 And all the sun-down glories of the West,
 And all the moorland which the moon has blest,
 Make me a dreamer, aye ! a coward, too,
 In all the weird expanse of mine unrest.

XIX.

IT is my curse to see thee and to learn
 That I must shun thee, though I blaze and burn
 With all this longing, all this fierce delight,—
 Fear-fraught and famished for a suitor's right ;
 A right conceded for a moment's space
 And then withdrawn as, amorous face to face,
 I dared to clasp thee and to urge a troth
 Too sovereign-sweet for one of Adam's race.

XX.

I AM a doom-entangled mirthless soul,
 Without the power to rid me of the dole
 Which, day by day, and nightly evermore
 Corrodes my peace ! Oh, smile, as once before,
 At each wild thought and each discarded plea,
 And let thy sentence, let thy suffrance be
 That I be reckoned till the day I die
 The sad-eyed Singer of thy fame and thee !

Third Litany.

AD TE CLAMAVI.

Third Litany.

AD TE CLAMAVI.



I.

AGAIN, O Love ! again I make lament,
And, Arab-like, I pitch my summer-tent
Outside the gateways of the Lord of Song.
I weep and wait, contented all day long
To be the proud possessor of a grief.
It comforts me. It gives me more relief
Than pleasures give ; and, spirit-like in air,
It re-invokes the peace that was so brief.

II.

It speaks of thee. It keeps me from the lake
Which else might tempt me ; and for thy sweet sake
I shun all evil. I am calmer now
Than when I wooed thee, calmer than the vow
Which made me thine, and yet so fond withal
I start and tremble at the wind's footfall.
Is it the wind ? Or is it mine own Past
Come back to life to lure me to its thrall ?

III.

I LONG to rise and seek thee where thou art,
And draw thee amorous to my wakeful heart
That beats for thee alone, in vague unrest.
I long to front thee when thou'rt lily-dressed
In white attire,—e'en like the flowers of old
That Jesus praised ; and, though the thought be bold,
I'm fain to kiss thee, Sweetheart ! through thy hair,
And hide my face awhile in all that gold.

IV.

I WILL not say what more might then be done,
And how, by moonlight or beneath the sun,
We might be happy. In a reckless mood
I've talked of this ; and dreams and many a brood
Of tongue-tied fancies have my soul beset.
I will not hint at fealty or the fret
Of lips untrue, or anger thee therein,
Or call to mind one word thou wouldst forget.

V.

I SHOULD withhold my raptures were I wise ;
I should not vex thee with my many sighs,
Or claim one tear from thee, though 'tis my due.
I should be silent. I should cease to sue !
Sorrow should teach me what I failed to learn
In days gone by ; and crossed at every turn
By some new doubt, new-born of my desires,
I should suppress the pangs with which I burn.

VI.

I AM an outcast from the land of love,
 And thou the Queen thereof, as white as dove
 New-spied from Heaven, and fine and fair to see
 As coy Queen Mab when, out upon the lea,
 She met her master and was loved of him.
 Thou art allied to long-haired cherubim,
 And I a something undesired of these,
 With woesome lips and eyes for ever dim.

VII.

I WAS ordained thy minstrel, but alas !
 I dare not greet thee when I see thee pass ;
 I scarce, indeed, may hope at any time,
 To work my will, or triumph in a rhyme
 To do thee honour ; no, nor make amends
 For unsought fervour, in the tangled ends
 Of my despair. How sad, how dark to me
 All things have grown since thou and I were friends !

VIII.

It is the fault of thy despotic glance,
 It is the memory of a day's romance
 When, true to thee, though taunted for my truth,
 I dared to solemnise the joys of youth
 In one wild chant. It is thy fault, I say !
 Thy piteous fault that, on the verge of May,
 I lost the right to live, as heretofore,
 Untouched by doubt from day to brightening day.

IX.

O SUMMER'S Pride ! I loved thee from the first,
And, like a martyr, I was blest and curst,
And saved and slain, and crowned and made anew,
A grief-glad man, with yearnings not a few,
But no just hope to win so fair a troth.

I should have known how one may weep for both
When lovers part, poor souls ! beneath the moon,
And how Remembrance may outlive an oath.

X.

THE nymphs, I think, were like thee in the glade
Of that Greek valley where the wine was made
For feasts of Bacchus ; for I dream at night
Of those creations, kind and calm and bright ;
And in my thought, unhallowed though it be,
The sun-born Muses turn their gaze on me,
And seem to know me as a friend of theirs,
Though all unfit to serve them on my knee.

XI.

THEY lived and sang. They died as visions die,
Supreme, eternal, offshoots of the sky,
Made and re-made, undraped and draped afresh,
To glad the earth like phantoms made of flesh,
And yet as mist-like as delusions are !
They stood beside Achilles in his car ;
They knew the gods and all their joysome deeds,
And all the chants that sprang from star to star.

XII.

THE myths of Greece, the maidens of the grove,
The dear dead fancies of the days of Jove,
Why were they banned? Oh, why in Reason's name,
Were they abolished? They were good to claim,
And good to dream of, and to crown with bays,
Far-seen of men, far-shining in the haze

Of withering doubts. They were the world's elect,
As thou art mine, to bow to and to praise.

XIII.

NIGHT after night I see thee, in my dreams,
As fair as Daphne, with the morning beams
Of thy bright locks about thee like a cloak,—
Fair as the young Aurora when she woke
At Phæthon's call, athwart the mountain-heights.
I see thee radiant in the summer nights,

And, bosom-packed with frenzies unrepressed,
I thrill to thee in Slumber's soft delights.

XIV.

I SEE thee pout. I see thee in disdain
Look out, reluctant, through the falling rain
Of thy long hair. I feel thee close at hand.
I note thy breathing as I loose the band
That binds thy waist, and then to waking life
I backward start! Despair is Sorrow's wife;

And I am Sorrow, and Despair's mine own,
To lure me on to madness or to strife.

XV.

My sex offends thee, or the thought of this ;
For I did fright thee when I flecked a kiss
With too much heat. I should have bowed to thee,
And left unsaid the word, deception-free,
Which, like a flash, illumed the love within.
My wilfulness was much to blame therein ;
But thou wilt shrive me, Sweet ! of mine offence,
If passion-pangs be deemed so dark a sin.

XVI.

OH, give me back my soul that with the same
I may achieve a deed of poet-fame,
Or die belauded on the battle-field !
There's much to seek. My hand is strong to wield
Weapon or pen. If thou consent thereto
Deeds may be done. If not, thine eyes are blue
And Heaven is there,—a twofold tender shrine
Whose wrath I fear, whose judgment still I rue !

XVII.

I AM but half myself. The life in me
Is nigh crushed out ; and, though I seem to see
Glory, and grace, and joy, as in the past,
They are but shadows on the cozening blast,
And dreams of devils and distorted things,
And snakes coiled up that look like wedding rings,
And faded flowers that once were fit for wreaths
In bygone summers and in perished springs.

XVIII.

THERE is a curse in every garden place,
 And when, at night, the lily's holy face
 Looks up to God, it seems to chide me there.
 The very sun with all his golden hair
 Is ill at ease, and birth and death of day
 Bring no relief ; and darkly on my way
 My memory comes,—the ghost of my Delight,—
 To fret and fume at woes it cannot slay.

XIX.

OH, bid me smile again, as in the time
 When all the breezes seemed to make a chime,
 And all the birds on all the woodland slopes
 Had trills for me, and seemed to guess the hopes
 That warmed my heart. O thou whom I adore !
 How proud were I,—though wounded bitter-sore
 By shafts of doubt,—if, in default of love
 I could but win thy friendship as of yore.

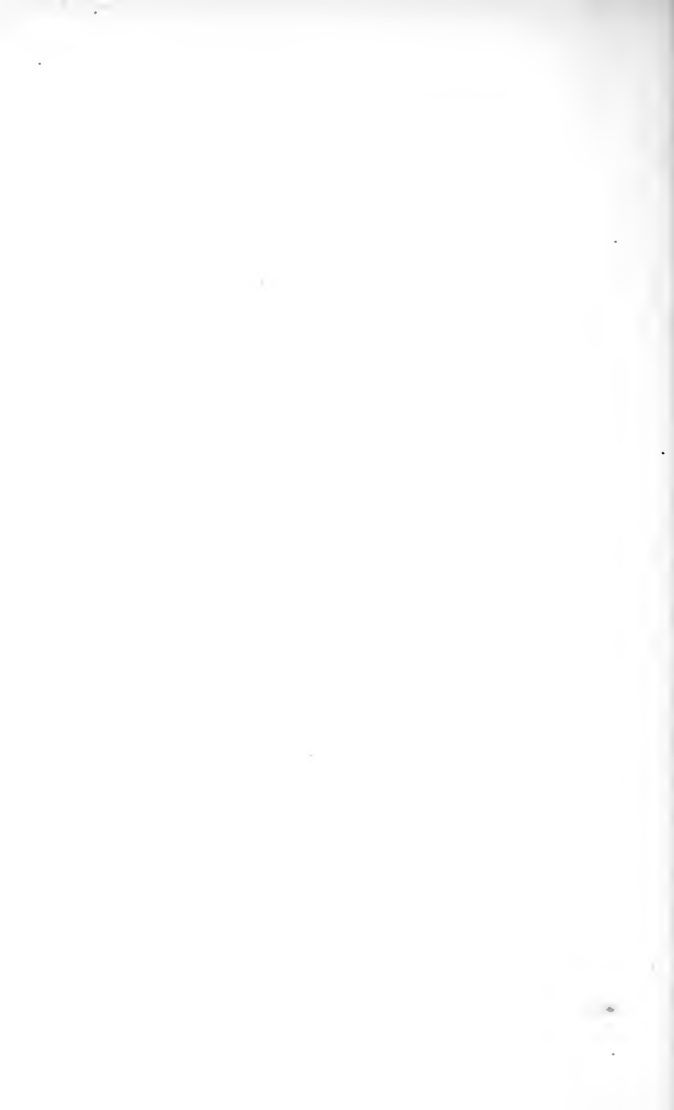
XX.

THEN were I blest indeed, and crowned of fate
 As kings are crowned, as bards in their estate
 Are rapture-fraught, re-risen above the dust.
 Then were I torture-proof, and on the crust
 Of one kind word, though as a pittance thrown,
 I'd live for weeks ! My tears I would disown,
 And pray, contented with my discontent,
 As hermits pray when storms are overblown.



Fourth Litany.

GRATIA PLENA.



Fourth Litany.

GRATIA PLENA.



I.

OH, smile on me, thou siren of my soul !
That I may curb my thoughts to some control
And not offend thee, as in truth I do,
Morning, and noon and night, when I pursue
My vagrant fancies, unallowed of thee,
But fraught with such consolement unto me
As may be felt in homeward-sailing ships
When wind and wave contend upon the sea.

II.

DOWER me with patience and imbue me still
With some reminder, when the night is chill,
Of thy dear presence, as, in winter-time,
The maiden moon, that tenderly doth climb
The lofty heavens, hath yet a beam to spare
For doleful wretches in their dungeon-lair ;
E'en thus endow me in my chamber dim
With some reminder of thy face so fair !

III.

QUIT thou thy body while thou sleepest well,
And visit mine at midnight, by the spell
That knows not shame. For in the House of Sleep
All things are pure ; and in the silence deep
I'll wait for thee, and thou, contrition-wise,
Wilt seek my couch and this that on it lies,
 This frame of mine that lives for thee alone
As palmers live for peace that never dies.

IV.

IT were a goodly thing to spare a foe
And kill his hate. And I would e'en do so !
For I would kill the coyness of thy face.
I would enfold thee in my spurned embrace
And kiss the kiss that gladdens as with wine.
Yea, I would wrestle with those arms of thine,
 And, like a victor, I would vanquish thee,
And, tyrant-like, I'd teach thee to be mine.

V.

FOR, what is peace that we should cling thereto
If war be wisest ? If the death we woo
Be fraught with fervour there's delight in death !
There is persuasion in the tempest's breath
Not known in calm ; and raptures round us flow
When, like an arrow through the bended bow
 Of two fond lips, the quivering dart of love
Brings down the kiss which saints shall not bestow.

VI.

THE soldier dies for country and for kin ;
He dies for fame that is so sweet to win ;
And, part for duty, part for battle-doom,
He wends his way to where the myrtles bloom ;
He gains a grave, perchance a recompense
Beyond his seeking, and a restful sense
Of soul-completion, far from any strife,
And far from memory of his land's defence.

VII.

BE this my meed,—to die for love of thee,
As when the sun goes down upon the sea
And finds no mate in all the realms of earth.
I, too, have looked on Nature in its worth
And found no resting-place in all the spheres,
And no relief beyond my sonnet-tears,—
The soul-fed shudderings of my lonely harp
That knows the gamut now of all my fears.

VIII.

I WEAR thy colours till the day I die :
A glove, a ribbon, and a rose thereby,
All joined in one. I revel in these things ;
For, once an angel, unarrayed in wings,
Came to my side, and beamed on me, and said :
“I love thee, friend !” and then, with lifted head,
Gave me a rose on which the dew had fallen ;
And, like the flower, she blushed a virgin-red.

IX.

I FOUND the glove down yonder in the dale.
I knew 'twas thine ; its colour, creamy-pale,
Filled me with joy. "A prize !" I cried aloud,
And snatched it up, as zealous then, and proud,
As one who wins a knighthood in his youth ;
And I was moved thereat, in very sooth,

And kissed it oft, and called on kindly Heaven
To be the sponsor of mine amorous truth.

X.

I EARNED the ribbon as we earn a smile
For service done. I helped thee at the stile ;
And so 'twas mine, my trophy, as of right.
Oh, never yet was ribbon half so bright !
It seemed of sky-descent,—a strip of morn
Thrown on the sod,—a something summer-worn

To be my guerdon ; and, enriched therewith,
I followed thee, thy suitor, through the corn.

XI.

I TROD on air. I seemed to hear the sound
Of fifes and trumpets and the quick rebound
Of bells unseen,—the storming of a tower
By imps audacious, and the sovereign power
Of some arch-fairy, thine acquaintance sure
In days gone by ; for, all the land was pure,

As if new-blest,—the land and all the sea
And all the welkin where the stars endure.

XII.

WE journeyed on through fields that were a-glow
With cowslip buds and daisies white as snow ;
And hand in hand, we stood beside a shrine
At which a bard, whom lovers deem divine,
Laid down his life ; and, as we gazed at this,
There seemed to issue from the wood's abyss
A sound of trills, as if, in its wild way,
A nightingale were pondering on a kiss.

XIII.

A LANE was reached that led I know not where,
Unless to Heaven,—for Heaven was surely there,
And thou so near it ! And within a nook
A-down whose covertness a noisy brook
Did talk of peace, I learnt of thee my fate ;
The word of pity that was kin to hate,—
The voice of reason that was reason's foe
Because it spurned the love that was so great !

XIV.

BUT I must pause. I must, from day to day,
Keep back my tears, and seek a surer way
Than Memory's track. I must, with lifted eyes,
Re-shape my life, and heed the battle-cries
Of prompt ambition, and be braced at call
To do such deeds as haply may befall,
If, freed of thee, and chartered to myself,
I may undo the bonds that now enthrall.

XV.

SHALL I do this? I shall ; and thou shalt see
Signs of rebellion. I will turn to thee
And claim obedience. I will make it plain
How many a link may go to form a chain,
And each a circlet, each a ring to wear
I will extract the sting from my despair
And toy therewith, as with a charmed snake,
That, Lamia-like, uprears itself in air.

XVI.

OR is my boast a vain, an empty one,
And shall I rue it ere the day is done?
Will hope revive betimes? Or must I stand
For evermore outside the fairyland
Of thy good will? Alas ! my place is here,
To muse and moan and sigh and shed my tear,
My paltry tear for one who loves me not,
And would not mourn for me on my death-bier.

XVII.

OH, get thee hence, thou harbinger of light !
That, like a dream, dost come to me at night
To haunt my sleep, and rob me of content,
So true-untrue, so deaf to my lament,
I must forego the pride I felt therein.
Aye, get thee hence ! And I will crush the sin,
If sin it be, that prompts me, night and day,
To seek in thee the bliss I cannot win.

XVIII.

OR, if thou needs must haunt me after dark,
Come when I wake. The oriole and the lark
Are friends of thine ; and oft, I know, the thrush
Has trilled of thee at morn and even-blush.
And flowers have made confessions unto me
At which I marvel ; for they rail at thee

And call thee heartless in thy seemlihood,
Though queen-elect of all the flowers that be.

XIX.

NAY, heed me not ! I rave ; I am possessed
By utmost longing. I am sore oppressed
By thoughts of woe ; and in my heart I feel
A something keener than the touch of steel,
As if, to-day, a danger unforeseen
Had tracked thy path,—as if my prayers had been

Misjudged in Heaven, or drowned in demon-shouts
Beyond the boundaries of the coasts terrene.

XX.

BUT this is clear ; this much at least is true :
I am thine own ! I doat upon the blue
Of thy kind eyes, well knowing that in these
Are proofs of God ; and down upon my knees
I fall subservient, as a man in shame
May own a fault ; albeit, as with a flame,
I burn all day, abashed and unforgiven,
And all unfit to touch the hand I claim !



Fifth Litany.

SALVE REGINA.



Fifth Litany.

SALVE REGINA.



I.

GLORY to thee, my Queen ! whom far away
My thoughts aspire to,—as the birds of May
Aspire o' mornings,—as in lonely nooks
The gurgling murmurs of neglected brooks
Aspire to moonlight,—aye ! as earth aspires
When through the East, alert with wild desires,
The rapturous sun surveys the welkin's height,
And flecks the world with witcheries of his fires.

II.

OH, I should curb my grief. I should entone
No plaint to thee ; no loss should I bemoan !
I should be patient, I, though full of care,
And not attempt, by bias of a prayer,
To sway thy spirit, or to urge anew
A claim contested. For my days are few ;
My days, I think, are few upon the earth
Since I must shun the joys I would pursue.

III.

I AM not worthy of the Heaven I name
When I name thee ; and yet to win the same
Is still my dream. I strive as best I can
To live uprightly on the vaunted plan
Of old-world sages. But I strive not well ;
And thoughts conflicting which I cannot quell
Make me despondent ; and I quake thereat,
As at the shuddering of a doomsday bell.

IV.

To die for thee were more than my desèrt ;
To live for thee to keep thee out of hurt
And, like a slave, to wait upon thy will
Were more than fame. And lo ! I nourish still
A sense of calm to feel that thou, at least,
Art sorrow-free and honoured at the feast
Which Nature spreads for all contented minds ;
And that for thee its splendours have increased.

V.

I STAND alone. I stand beneath the trees,
I guess their thoughts ; I hear them to the breeze
Say tender nothings ; and I dream the while
Of thy white arms, and thy remembered smile,
When, in a spot like this, a year a-gone,
I saw thee stoop to pluck from off the lawn
A wounded bird that peered into thy face
As if it took thee for the nymph of dawn !

VI.

OH, can it be, as friends of thine affirm,
That thou'rt a fairy,—that, from term to term,
Month after month, beloved of all good things,
Thou'rt seen in forests and in meadow rings
Girt for the dance? or like an Oread queen
Arrayed for council? For the woods convene
Their dryad forces when the nights are clear,
And nymphs and fawns carouse upon the green.

VII.

THE crescent moon, the Argosy of heaven,
Veers for the west across the Pleiads seven,
And, out beyond the ridge of Charles's Wain,
It seems to come to mooring on the main
Of that deep sky, as if awaiting there
An angel-guest with sunlight in her hair,
A seraph's cousin, or the foster-child
Of some centurion of the upper air.

VIII.

Is it thy soul? Has Cynthia called for thee
In her white boat, to take thee o'er the sea
Where suns and stars and constellations bright
Are isles of glory,—where a seraph's right
Surpasses mine, and makes me seem indeed
A base intruder, with a coward's creed
And not an angel's, though a Christian born
And pledged always to serve thee at thy need?

IX.

THOU'RT sleeping now ; and in thy snowy rest,—
In that seclusion which is like a nest
For blameless human maids beheld of those
Who come from God,—thou hast in thy repose
No thought of me,—no thought of pairing-time.
For thou'rt the sworn opponent of the rhyme
That lovers make in kissing ; and anon
My very love will vex thee like a crime.

X.

BUT day and night, and winter-tide and spring,
Change at thy voice ; and when I hear thee sing
I know 'tis May ; and when I see thy face
I know 'tis Summer. Thou'rt the youngest Grace,
And all the Muses praise thee evermore.
And there are birds who name thee as they soar ;
And some of these,—the best and brightest ones,—
Have guessed the pangs that pierce me to the core.

XI.

THOU art the month of May with all its nights
And all its days transfigured in the lights
Of love-lit smiles and glances multiform ;
And, like a lark that sings above a storm,
Thy voice o'er-rides the tumult of my mind.
Oh, give me back the peace I strove to find
In my last prayer, and I'll believe that Hope
Will dry anon the tears that make it blind.

XII.

THERE'S none like thee, not one in all the world ;
No face so fair, no smile so sweet-impearled,
And no such music on the hills and plains
As thy young voice whereof the thrill remains
For hours and hours,—belike to keep alive
The sense of beauty that the flowers may thrive.

Or is't thy wish that birds should fly to thee
Before the days of April's quest arrive ?

XIII.

THOU'RT noble-natured ; and there's none to stand
So meek as thou, or with so dear a hand
To ward off wrong. For Psyche of the Greeks
Is dead and gone ; and Eros with his freaks
Has bowed to thee, and turned aside, for shame,
His useless shaft, not daring to proclaim

His amorous laws, and thou so maiden-coy
Beneath the halo of thy spotless name !

XIV.

BUT dreams are idle, and I must forget
All that they tend to. I must cease to fret,
Moth as I am, for stars beyond the reach
Of mine up-soaring ; and in milder speech
I must invoke thy blessing on the road
That lies before me,—far from thine abode,
And far from all persuasion that again
Thou wilt accept the terms of my love-code.

XV.

O SWEET ! forgive me that from day to day
I dream such dreams, and teach me how to sway
My fluttering self, that, in forsaken hours,
I may be valiant, and eschew the powers
Of death and doubt ! I need the certitude
Of thine esteem that I may check the feud
Of mine own thoughts that rend and anger me
Because denied the boon for which I sued.

XVI.

TEACH me to wait with patience for a word,
And be the sight of thee no more deferred
Than one up-rising of the vesper star
That waits on Dian when, supreme, afar,
She eyes the sunset. And of this be sure,
As I'm a man and thou a maid demure,
Thou shalt be ta'en aside and wondered at,
Before the gloaming leaves the land obscure.

XVII.

THOU shalt be bowed to as we bow to saints
In windowed shrines ; and, far from all attainments
Of ribald passion, thou, as seemeth good,
Wilt smile serenely in thy virginhood.
Nor shall I know, of mine own poor accord,
Which thing in all the world is best to hoard,
Or which is worst of all the things that slay :
A woman's beauty or a soldier's sword.

XVIII.

I GRIEVE in sleep. I pine away at night.
I wake, uncared for, in the morning light ;
And, hour by hour, I marvel that for me
The wandering wind should make its minstrelsy
So sweet and calm. I marvel that the sun,
So round and red, with all his hair undone,
Should smile at me and yet begrudge me still
The sight of thee that art my worshipped one !

XIX.

I COUNT my moments as a cloistered man
May count his beads ; and through the weary span
Of each long day I peer into my heart
For hints of comfort ; and I find, in part,
A self-committal, and a glimpse withal
Of some new menace in the rise and fall
Of days and nights that are the test of Time
Though Fate would make a mockery of them all.

XX.

THERE'S a disaster worse than loss of gold,
Worse than remorse, and worse a thousand-fold,
Than pangs of hunger. 'Tis the thirst of love,—
The rage and rapture of the ravening dove
We name Desire. Ah, pardon ! I offend.
My fervour blinds me to the withering end
Of all good counsel, and, accurst thereby,
I vaunt anew the faults I cannot mend.



Sixth Litany.

BENEDICTA TU.



Sixth Litany.

BENEDICTA TU.



I.

I TELL thee, Sweet ! there lives not on the earth
A love like mine in all the height and girth
And all the vast completion of the sphere.
I should be proud, to-day, to shed a tear
If I could weep. But tears are most denied
When most besought ; and joys are sanctified
By joys' undoing in this world of ours
From dusk to dawn and dawn to eventide.

II.

WERT thou a marble maid and I endowed
With power to move thee from thy seeming shroud
Of frozen splendour,—all thy whiteness mine,
And all the glamour, all the tender shine
Of thy glad eyes,—ah, God ! if this were so,
And I the loosener, in the summer-glow,
Of thy long tresses ! I were licensed then
To gaze, unchidden, on thy limbs of snow.

III.

I WOULD prepare for thee a holy niche
In some new temple, and with draperies rich,
And flowers and lamps and incense of the best,
I would with something of mine own unrest
Imbue thy blood and prompt thee to be just.
I would endow thee with a fairer trust

Than mere contentment, and a dearer joy
Than mere revulsion from the sins of dust.

IV.

A BAND of boys, with psaltery and with lyre,
And Cyprian girls, the slaves of thy desire,
Would chant and pray and raise so wild a storm
Of golden notes around thy sculptured form
That saints would hear the chorus up in Heaven,
And intermingle with their holy steven

The sighs of earth, and long for other cares
Than those ordained them by the Lord's Eleven.

V.

I WOULD approach thee with a master's tread
And claim thy hand and have the service read
By youthful priests resplendent every one ;
And in thy frame the blood of thee would run
As warm and sound as wine of Syracuse.
And all that day the birds would bear the news

In far directions, and the meadow-flowers
Would dream thereof, love-laden, in the dews.

VI.

THEN, by magnetic force,—the greatest known
This side the tomb,—I would athwart the stone
Of thy white body, in a trice of time,
Call forth thy soul, and woo thee to the chime
Of tinkling bells, and make thee half afraid,
And half aggrieved, to find thyself arrayed
In such enthrallment, and in such attire,
In sight of one whose will should not be stayed.

VII.

AND, like Pygmalion, I would claim anon
A bride's submission ; and my talk thereon
Would not perplex thee ; for the sense of life
Would warm thy heart, and urge thee to the strife
Of lip with lip, and kiss with pulsing kiss,
Which gives the clue to all we know of bliss,
And all we know of heights we long to climb
Beyond the boundaries of the grave's abyss.

VIII.

THE dear old deeds chivalrous once again
Would find fulfilment ; and the curse of Cain
Which fell on woman, as on men it fell,
Would fly from us, as at a sorcerer's spell,
And leave us wiser than the sophists are
Who love not folly. Night should not debar,
Nor day dissuade us, from those ecstasies
That have Anacreon's fame for guiding-star.

IX.

AYE ! thou wouldst kneel and seek in me apace
A transient shelter for thine amorous face
Which then I'd screen ; and thou to me wouldst turn
With awe-struck eyes, and cling to me and yearn,
With sighs full tender and a touch of fear.
And, like a bird which knows that spring is near,
And, after spring, the summer of sweet days,
Thou wouldst attune thy love-notes in mine ear.

X.

OR, fraught with feelings near akin to hate,
Thou wouldst denounce me ; and, like one elate,
Thou wouldst entwine me in thine arms so white,
As soldier-nymphs, with rapt and raging sight,
Made war with spearsmen in the vales of song,—
The vales of Sparta where, for right or wrong,
The gods were potent, and, for beauty's sake,
Upheld the tourneys of the fair and strong.

XI.

I WOULD not seem too wilful in the heat
Of our encounter, or with sighs repeat
Too fierce a vow. I would throughout confess
Thy murderous mirth, thy conquering loveliness,
And then subdue thee ! Tears would not avail
Nor prayer, nor praise ; and, flushed the while or pale,
Thou shouldst be mine, my hostage in the night,
Without the option of a moment's bail.

XII.

THOU shouldst be mine ! My hopes, from first to last,
Would win their way ; and, lithe and love-aghast,
And all unnerved, thou wouldst, as in a dream
Entreat my pardon ! I would callous seem
To thine out-yearning. I would cast on thee
A questioning look, and then, upon my knee,
I would surrender to that face of thine
Which is the great world's wonder unto me.

XIII.

O HEAVEN ! could this be done, and I fulfil
One half my wish, and curb thee to my will,
I were a prompter and a prouder man
Than earth has known since light-foot lovers ran
For Atalanta, loved of men and boys.
I were a kaiser then, a king of joys,
And fit to play with high-begotten pomps
As children play with pebbles or with toys.

XIV.

O GOLDEN Hair ! O Gladness of an Hour
Made flesh and blood ! O beauteous Human Flower
Too sweet to pluck, and yet, though seeming-cold,
Ordained to love ! I pray thee, as of old,
Be kind to me. I saw thee yesternight,
And for an instant I was urged to plight
My troth again ; for in thy face I saw
What seemed a smile evoked for my delight.

XV.

RE-GRANT thy favour ! Take me by the hand
And lead me back again to thine own land,
The nook supreme, the sanctum in the glen
Where pixies walk,—unknown to peevish men
And shrew-like women whom no faith uplifts !
Show me the place where Nature keeps the gifts

She most approves, and where the song-birds dwell,
And I'll forego the land of little thrifts.

XVI.

THE moon is mother and the sun is sire
Of those young planets which, with infant fire,
Have late been found in regions too remote
For quicker search ; and these, in time, will dote
And whirl and wanton in the realms of space.
For there are comets in the nightly chase

Who see strange things untalked of by the bards ;
And earth herself has found a trysting-place.

XVII.

AND so 'tis clear that sun and moon and stars
Are linked by love ! The marriage-feast of Mars
Was fixed long since. 'Tis Venus whom he weds.
'Tis she alone for whom he gaily treads
His path of splendour ; and of Saturn's ring
He knows the symbol, and will have, in spring,
A night-betrothal, near the Southern Cross ;
And all the stars will pause thereat and sing.

XVIII.

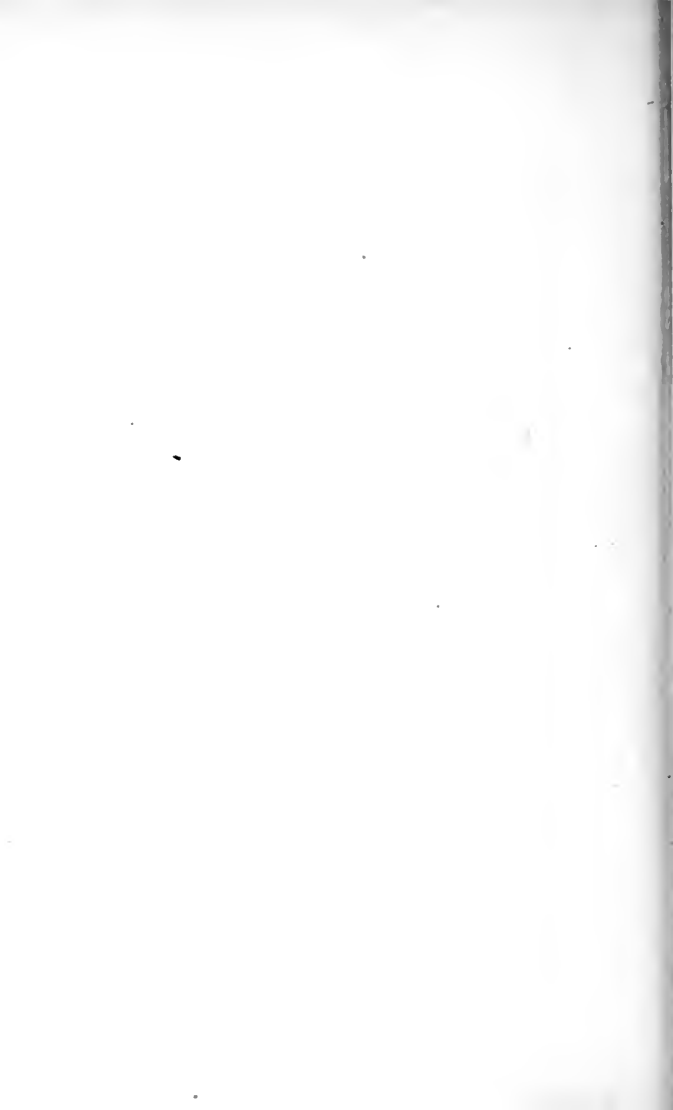
WHAT wonder, then, what wonder if to-day
I, too, assert my right, in roundelay,
To talk of rings and posies and the vows
That wait on marriage? 'Tis the wild carouse
Of soul with soul athwart the sense of touch.
'Tis this uplifts us when, with fever-clutch,
The world would claim us ; and our hopes revive
In spite of fears that daunt us over-much.

XIX.

LIPS may be coy ; but eyes are quick, at times,
To note the throbbings that are hot as crimes,
And fond as flutterings of the wings of doves.
For he is blind indeed who, when he loves,
Doubts all he sees :—the flickering of a smile,
The Parthian glance, the nod that, for awhile,
Outbids Elysium and is half a jest,
And half a truth, to tempt us and beguile.

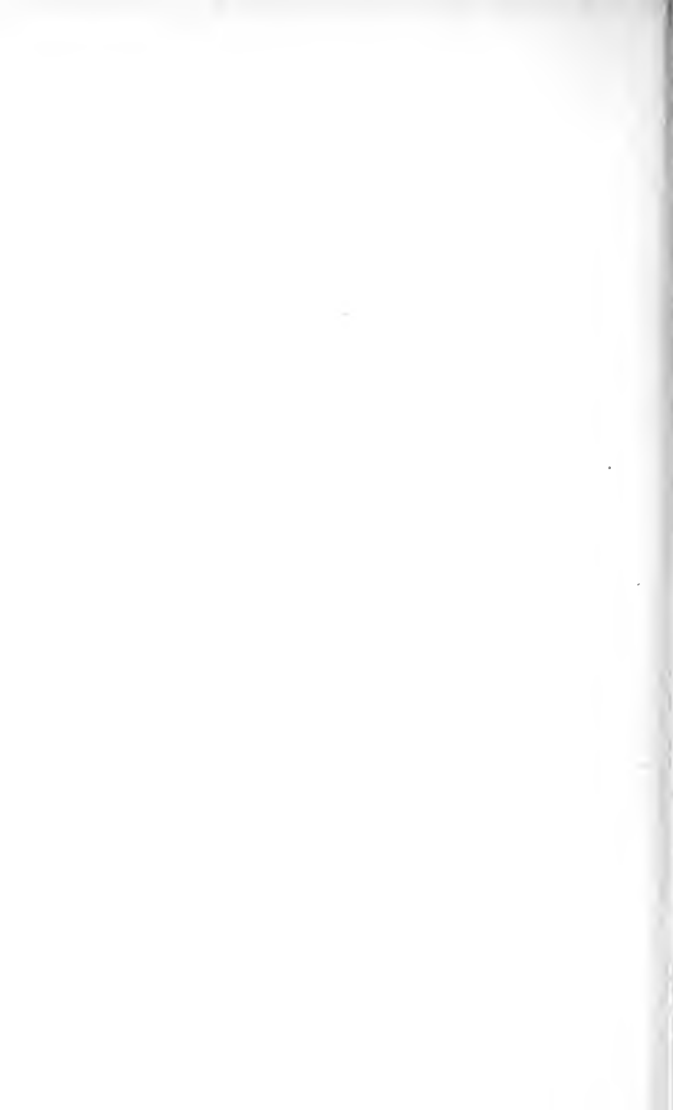
XX.

THINE eyes have told me things I dare not speak ;
And I will trust the track they bid me seek,
Yea, though it lead me to the gates of death.
The wind is labouring. It is out of breath,—
Belike for scampering up the hill so fast
To say all's well with thee ! And, down the blast,
I seem to hear the sounds of serenades
That swell from out the song-fields of the past.



Seventh Litany.

STELLA MATUTINA.



Seventh Litany.

STELLA MATUTINA.



I.

ARISE, fair Phœbus ! and with looks serene
Survey the world which late the orbèd Queen
Did pave with pearl to please enamoured swains.
Arise ! Arise ! The Dark is bound in chains,
And thou'rt immortal, and thy throne is here
To sway the seasons, and to make it clear
How much we need thee, O thou silent god !
That art the crowned controller of the year.

II.

AND while the breezes reconstruct for thee
The shimmering clouds ; and while, from lea to lea,
The great earth reddens with a maid's delight,
Behold ! I bring to thee, as yesternight,
My subject-song. Do thou protect apace
My peerless one,—my Peri with the face
That is a marvel to the minds of men,
And like a flower for humbleness of grace.

III.

THE earth which loves thee, or I much have erred,
The glad, green earth which waits, as for a word,
The sound of thee, — up-shuddering through the
morn,—

The restive earth is pleased when Day is born,
And soon will take each separate silent beam
As proof of sex,—exulting in the dream

Of joys to come, and quickened and convulsed,
Year after year, by love's triumphant theme.

IV.

A THOUSAND times the flowers in all the fields
Will bow to thee ; and with their little shields
The daisy-folk will muster on the plain.

A thousand songs the birds will sing again,
As sweet to hear as quiverings of a lute ;
And she I love will sing, for thy repute,

Full many a song. She sings when she but speaks ;
And when she's near the birds should all be mute.

V.

O MY Belovèd ! from thy curtained bed
Arise, rejoice, uplift thy golden head,
And be an instant, while I muse on this,
As nude as statues, and as good to kiss
As dear St. Agnes when she met her death,
Unclad and pure and patient of her breath,

And with the grace of God for wedding-gown,
As many an ancient story witnesseth.

VI.

THE bath, the plunge, the combing of the hair,
All this I view,—a sight beyond compare
Since Daphne died in all the varied charms
Of her chaste body,—rounded regal arms,
And shape supreme, too fair for human gaze,
But not too fair to win the mirror's praise
That throbs to see thee in thy déshabille
And loves thee well through all the nights and days.

VII.

I SEE thee thus in fancy, as in books
A man may see the naiads of the brooks,—
As one entranced by potions aptly given
May see the angels where they walk in Heaven,
And may not greet them in their high estate.
For who shall guess the riddle wrought of Fate
Till he be dead? And who that lives a span
Shall thwart the Future where it lies in wait?

VIII.

AND now to-day a word I dare not write
Starts to my lips, as when a baffled knight
Withholds a song which fain he would repeat ;
For lo ! the sense thereof is passing sweet,
And, like a cup that's full, my heart is filled
With new desires and quiverings new-distilled
From old delights ; and all my pulses throb
As at the touch of dreams divinely-willed.

IX.

WHO talks of comfort when he sees thee not
And feels no fragrance of the happy lot
Which violets feel, when called upon to lie
On thy white breast? And who with amorous eye
Looks at the dear tomb of the shuddering flowers,
The two-fold tomb where daintily for hours

They droop and muse,—who looks, I say, at these
And will not own the witchery of thy powers?

X.

WHO speaks of glory and the force of love,
And thou not near, my maiden-minded dove!
With all the coyness, all the beauty-sheen,
Of thy rapt face? A fearless virgin-queen,—
A queen of peace art thou!—and on thy head
The golden light of all thy hair is shed

Most nimbus-like and most suggestive, too,
Of youthful saints enshrined and garlanded.

XI.

THOU'RT Nature's own; and when a word of thine
Rings on the air, and when the Voice Divine
We call the lark upfloats amid the blue,
I know not which is which, for both are true,
Both meant for Heaven, though fostered here below.
And when the silences around me flow,

I think of lilies and the face of thee
Which hath compelled my manhood's overthrow.

XII.

O BLUE-EYED Rapture with the radiant locks !
O thou for whom, athwart the fever-shocks
Of life and death and misery and much sin,
I'd sell salvation ! There's a prize to win
And thou'rt its voucher ; there's a wonder-prize,
Unknown till now beneath the vaulted skies,
And thou'rt its symbol ; thou'rt its essence fair,
Its full completion formed adoring-wise !

XIII.

YES, I will tell thee how I love thee best,
And all my thoughts of thee shall be confessed
And none withheld, not e'en the witless one
Which late I harboured when the mounting sun
Burst from a cloud,—the moon a mile away,
As if in hiding from the lord of day,—
As if, at times, the moon were like thyself,
And feared the semblance of a master's sway.

XIV.

I LOVE thee dearly when thine eyes are dim
With unshed tears ; for then they seem to swim
In liquid blessedness, and unto me
There comes the memory of a god's decree
Which said of old :—“ Be all men evermore,
All men and maids whose hearts are passion-sore,
Acclaimed in Heaven !” and all day long I muse
On hope's divine and deathless prophet-lore.

XV.

I LOVE thee when the soft endearing flush
Invades thy face, and dimples in the blush
Bespeak attention,—as a rose's pout
Absorbs the stillness when the sun is out,
And all the air retains the glow thereof.
In all the world there is not light enough
Nor sheen enough, all day, nor any warmth,
Till thou be near me, armed with some rebuff!

XVI.

AND how I love thee when thy startled eyes
Look out at me, enrapt in that surprise
Which marks an epoch in the life I lead,—
As if they guessed the scope of Eros' creed
And all the mirth and malice of his wiles.
For it is wondrous when my Lady smiles,
And all the ground is holy where she treads,
And all the air is thrilled for many miles!

XVII.

IN every mood of thine thou art my joy,
And, day by day, to shield thee from annoy,
I'd do the deeds that slaves were bound unto
With stabs for payment,—shuddering thro' and thro'
With their much labour; and I'd deem it grand
To die for thee if, after touch of hand,
I might but kiss thee as a lover doth;
For I should then be king of all the land.

XVIII.

BUT Father Time, old Time with Janus-face
Looks o'er the sphere, and sees no fitting place
For thine acceptance ; for the thrones of earth
Are much too mean, and in thy maiden worth
Thou'rt crowned enough, and throned in very sooth
More than the queens who lord it in their youth
O'er men's convictions ; and he names thy name
As one beloved of Nature and of Truth.

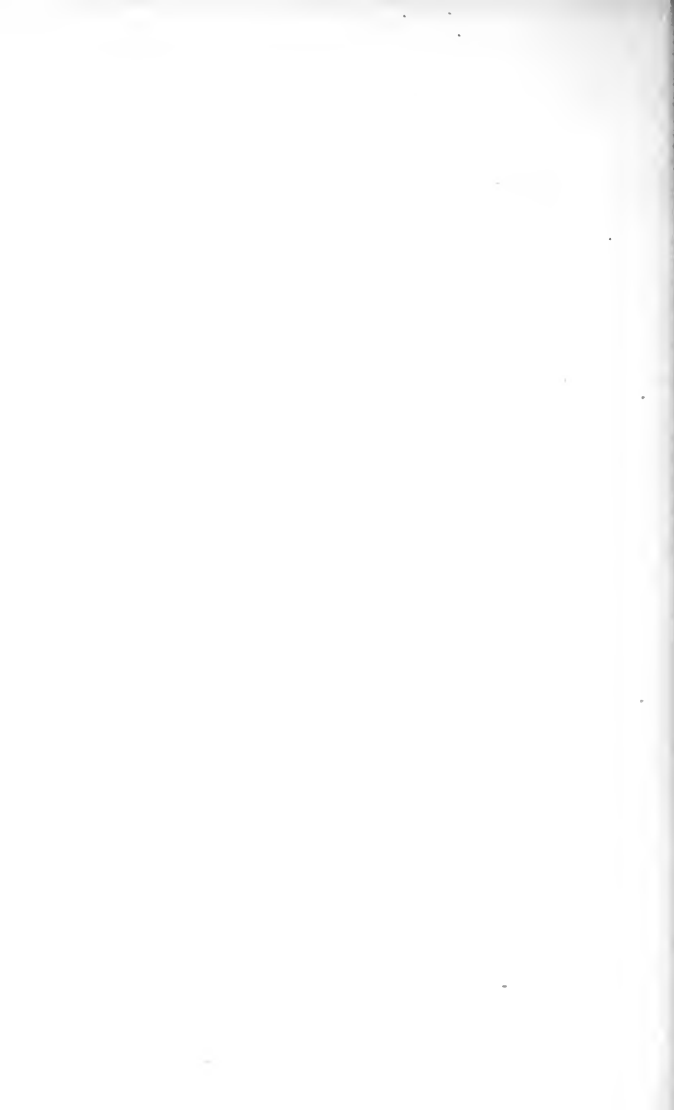
XIX.

HE sees the nights, he sees the veering days,
The sweet spring season with its hymn of praise,
The summer, frondage-proud,—the autumn pale,—
The winter worn with withering of the gale,—
All this he sees ; and now, to-day, in June,
He, too, recalls that rapturous afternoon

When all the fields and flowers were like a dream,
And all the winds the offshoot of a tune.

XX.

So I will cease to clamour for the past,
And seek suspension of my doubts at last,
In some new way till Fate becomes my friend.
I will regain the right to re-defend
The love I bear to thee, for good or ill.
For though, 'tis said, our griefs have power to kill,
Mine let me live, in mine unworthiness,
That, spurned of thee, my lips may praise thee still !



Eighth Litany.

DOMINA EXAUDI.



Eighth Litany.

DOMINA EXAUDI.



I.

IT seems a year, and more, since last we met,
Since roseate spring repaid, in part, its debt
To thy bright eyes, and o'er the lowlands fair
Made daffodils so like thy golden hair
That I, poor wretch, have kissed them on my knees !
Forget-Me-Nots peep out beneath the trees
So like thine eyes that I have questioned them,
And thought thee near, though viewless on the breeze.

II.

IT seems a year ; and yet, when all is told,
'Tis but a week since I was re-enrolled
Among thy friends. How fairy-like the scene !
How gay with lamps ! How fraught with tender sheen
Of life and languor ! I was thine alone :—
Alert for thee,—intent to catch the tone
Of thy sweet voice,—and proud to be alive
To call to heart a peace for ever flown.

III.

HAD I not vexed thee, as a monk in prayer
May vex a saint by musing, unaware,
On evil things? A saint is hard to move,
And quick to chide, and slow,—as I can prove,—
To do what's just ; and yet, in thy despite,
We met again, we too, at dead of night ;
 And I was hopeful in my love of thee,
And thou superb, and matchless, in the light.

IV.

I FELT distraught from gazing over-much
At thy great beauty ; and I feared to touch
The dainty hand which Envy's self hath praised.
I feared to greet thee ; and my soul was dazed
And self-convicted in its new design ;
For I was mad to hope to call thee mine,
 Aye ! mad as he who claims a Virgin's love
Because his lips have praised her at a shrine.

V.

I SAW thee there in all the proud array
Of thy young charms,—as if a summer's day
Had leapt to life and made itself a queen,—
As if the sylphs, remembering what had been,
Had missioned thee, from out the world's romance,
To stir my pulse, and thrill me with a glance :
 And once again, allowed, though undesired,
I did become thy partner in the dance.

VI.

I BOWED to thee. I drew thee to my side
 As one may seize a wrestler in his pride
 To try conclusions,—and I felt the rush
 Of my heart's blood suffuse me in a blush
 That told its tale. But what my tongue would tell
 Was spent in sighs, as o'er my spirit fell
 The silvery cadence of thy lips' assent ;
 And every look o'er-ruled me like a spell.

VII.

O DEVIL'S joy of dancing, when a tune
 Speeds us to Heaven, and night is at the noon
 Of all its frolic, all its wild desire !
 O thrall of rapt illusions when we tire
 Of coy reserve,—and when the moments pass
 As pass the visions in a magic glass,
 And every step is shod with ecstasy,
 And every smile is flecked with some Alas !

VIII.

WAS it a moment or a merry span
 Of years uncounted when convulsion ran
 Right through the veins of me, to make me blest
 And yet accurst, in that revolving quest
 Known as a waltz,—if waltz indeed it were
 And not a fluttering dream of gauze and vair
 And languorous eyes? I scarce can muse thereon
 Without a pang too sweet for me to bear !

IX.

BY right of music, for a fleeting term,
Mine arms enwound thee and I held thee firm,
There on my breast,—so near, yet so remote,
So close about me that I seemed to float
In sunlit rapture,—touched I know not how
By some suggestion of a deeper vow

Than men are 'ware of when, on Glory's track,
They kneel to angels with uplifted brow.

X.

AND lo ! abashed, I do recall to mind
All that is past :—the yearning undefined,—
The baulked confession that was like a sob—
The sound of singing and the gurgling throb
Of lute and viol,—meant for many things
But most for misery ; and a something clings

Close to my heart which is not wantonness,
Though, wanton-like, it warms me while it stings.

XI.

THE night returns,—that night of all the nights !
And I am dowered anew with such delights
As memory feeds on ; for I walked with thee
In moonlit gardens, and there flew to me
A flower-like moth, a pinioned daffodil,
From Nature's hand ; and, out beyond the hill,

There rose a star I joyed to look upon
Because it seemed the star of thy good will.

XII.

WE sat beneath the trees, as well thou know'st,
Within an arbour which a summer's boast
Had made ambrosial ; and we loitered there
Some little space, the while upon the air
Uprose the fragrance of uncounted flowers.
Ah me ! how weird a tryste was that of ours !

And how the moon looked down, so lurid-warm,
Athwart the stillness of the frondage-towers !

XIII.

I SEEMED to feel thy breath upon my cheek ;
I vainly searched for words I longed to speak,
But could not utter lest the sound thereof
Should scare away the elves that wait on love.
And when I spoke to thee 'twas of the spot
Where we were seated,—things that mattered not,—

Uncared for things,—the weather,—the new laws !
And, sudden-loud, the wind assailed the grot.

XIV.

A LITTLE bird was warbling overhead
As if to twit me with the word unsaid
Which he, more daring, when the sun was high,
Trilled to his mate ! He knew the tender "why"
Of many a pleading, and he knew, meseems,
The very key-note to the lyric dreams

Of all true poets when, by love impelled,
They search the secrets of the woods and streams.

XV.

'TIS sure that summer, when she reared the bower
And arched the roof and gave it all the dower
Of all its leaves, and all the crannies small
Where wrens look through,—'tis sure that, after all,
Summer was kind, and meant to make for me
A shriving-place,—a lighthouse on the sea
Of all that verdure,—that, beneath the stars,
I might receive one quickening glance from thee.

XVI.

OH ! had I dared to whisper in thine ear
My heart-full wish, undaunted by the fear
Of some rebuke :—a flush of thy fair face,
A lifted hand to tell me that the place
Was fairy-fenced, and guarded as by flame.
Oh ! had I dared to court the word of blame,—
That's good for me, no doubt ! at every turn,—
My life to-day were chastened by the same.

XVII.

BUT I was conscious of a sudden ban
Hurled from the zenith. I was like the man
Who scaled Olympus, with intent to bring
New fire therefrom, and dared not face the King
Of thought and thunder. I was full prepared
For thy displeasure,—for the past was bared
To mine on-looking ; and, with faltering tongue,
I left my languorous meanings undeclared.

XVIII.

O LOST Occasion ! what a thing art thou :—
 A three-fold key,—the when, the where, the how,—
 The past, the present and the future tense,—
 All thrown aside. For what ? A witless sense
 Of some compunction ! When the hours are bold
 Reason is shy ; and rapture, seeming-cold,
 Makes mute surrender of its dearest chance,
 And all for fear of doubts that might be told.

XIX.

BUT could we meet, oh ! could we meet again
 On some such night, unseen upon the plain,
 I'd rob thee, Lady ! of a tardy smile.
 I would do this ; and, for a breathing-while,
 I would assert a sinner's right to pray,
 A sinner's right to choose, as best he may,
 His patron-saint ; and I would kneel to thee,
 And call thee mine, and dote on thee for aye !

XX.

AND then in summer, when the hours are mad,
 And all the flowerets in the fields are glad,
 And all the breezes, like demented things,
 Outspeed the birds with sunlight on their wings,
 In summer, aye ! in summer's glorious time,
 I may perchance be pardoned for the crime
 Of my much love, and win thy benison
 Ere yet the year has reached its golden prime !

Wintb Litany.

LILIUM INTER SPINAS.



Rinth Litany.

LILIUM INTER SPINAS.



I.

DEAREST and best of maidens, whom the Fates
Have dowered with beauty, whom the glory-gates
Have shown so splendid in my waking sight,
Is't well, thou syren, thus to haunt the night
And grant no mercy, none from week to week
All through the year? Is't well my soul to seek
And shun my body? Is't throughout ordained
That thou should'st spurn a love so tender-meek?

II.

It is my joy to praise thee,—'tis my pride
E'en thus to greet thee though anew denied
The chance of wisdom, and for this, who knows?
I shall be counted, ere the season's close,
A time-perverter. Yes! I shall be shamed,
And frowned upon, and day by day proclaimed
A foe to virtue, though, in seeking thee,
I seek the goal that Virtue's self hath named.

III.

O LILY mine ! O Lily tipped with gold
And welkin-eyed for angels to behold
When down on earth ! Is't well to stand apart
And gaze at me and gently break my heart
Without one word ? Is't well to seem alway
So grieved to see me, when, at fall of day,
Thou dost accept the reverence of mine eyes,
But not the homage that my lips would pay ?

IV.

OH, give me back again, at midnight hour,
As in the circuit of that starlit bower,
The right to talk with thee, and be thy friend,—
The right, in some wild way, to make an end
Of my submission, or to re-bestow
My troth on thee,—despite the overthrow
Of all my dreams, that were my constant care,
Though less to thee than flakes of alien snow.

V.

I WILL unveil my meanings one by one,
And tell thee why the bird that loves the sun
Loves not the moon, though conscious of her fame.
For he's the soul of truth, in his acclaim,
And knows not treason ! And of like intent
Are all my yearnings, too, when I lament.
And, though I say it, there's no troubadour
Has lov'd as I, since Cupid's bow was bent.

VI.

I HAVE been wed in sleep, and thou hast been
Mine own true bride,—the swooning summer-queen
Of my heart-throbs. I have been wed in jest !
I have been taken wildly to thy breast,
And then repelled, and made to feel the ire
Of eager eyes that have the strange desire
To rack my soul,—a-tremble in the dark,—
But not the will to aid me to aspire.

VII.

I SHOULD have died the instant that I heard
Thy vow in slumber,—when a whispered word
Made me thy master,—for I did receive
Thy full surrender, and I'll not believe
That all was false ; or that my dreaming-power
Was given for nought. The Future may devour
The facts of earth, but not its phantasies,
And not the dreams we dream from hour to hour.

VIII.

OH, thou'lt confess that love from man to maid
Is more than kingdoms,—more than light and shade
In sky-built gardens where the minstrels dwell,
And more than ransom from the bonds of Hell.
Thou wilt, I say, admit the truth of this,
And half relent that,—shrinking from a kiss,—
Thou didst consign me to mine own disdain,
Athwart the raptures of a visioned bliss.

IX.

I'LL seek no joy that is not linked with thine,
No touch of hope, no taste of holy wine,
And, after death, no home in any star
That is not shared by thee, supreme, afar,
As here thou'rt first and foremost of all things !
Glory is thine and gladness and the wings
That wait on thought when, in thy spirit-sway,
Thou dost invest a realm unknown to kings.

X.

I WILL accept of thee a poison-bowl
And drink the dregs thereof,—aye ! to the soul,—
And sound thy praises with my latest breath !
I was a pilgrim bound for Nazareth,
But when I knew thee, when I touched thy hand,
I changed my purpose ; and to-day I stand
Thine amorous vassal, though denounced afresh
And warned away, unkissed, from Edenland.

XI.

O FLOWER unequalled here from morn to morn !
Is't well, bethink thee, with a rose's thorn
To deck thyself, thou lily ! and to seem
So irresponsible to my passion-dream ?
Is't a caprice of thine to look so proud,
And so severe, athwart the shining cloud
Of thy long hair ? And shall I never learn
How least to grieve thee when my vows are vowed ?

XII.

THE full perfection of thy face is such
That, like a child's, it seems to know the touch
Of some glad hour that God has smiled upon.
There is a whiteness whiter than the swan,—
A singing sweeter than the linnet's note;
But there is nothing whiter than thy throat,
And nothing sweeter than thy tender voice
When, love-attuned, it skyward seems to float.

XIII.

LILY and rose in one ! To find thy peer
Exceeds belief, all through the varying year ;
For chance thereof, and hope thereof, is none.
There comes no rival to the rising sun,
And none to thee !—no rival to the moon
That sets in Venice on the far lagoon,
And none to thee, thou marvel of the months,
That art the cynosure of night and noon !

XIV.

YES, I will hope. I will not cease to turn
My thoughts to thee, and cry to thee, and yearn,
As one in Hell may lift enamoured eyes
To some sweet soul beyond the central skies
Whose face has slain him ! For 'tis true, I swear :
I have been murdered by thy golden hair,
And by the brightness of those fringed orbs
That are at once my joy and my despair.

XV.

WINTER is wild,—but spring will come again.
And there's compunction in the fever-pain
Which earth endures, when, clamorous down the steep,
The wind out-blows the curse it cannot keep.
And so, belike, thy scorn of me may change
To something fairer than the fated range
Of dole, and doubt, and pity, and reproof;
And then my sighs may cease to seem so strange.

XVI.

FOR thou and I will meet and not be foes,
E'en as the rue may stand beside the rose
And not affront it,—as a lonely tree
May guard a shrine and not upon the lea
Be deemed obtrusive,—as an errant knight
May serve the sovereign of his soul's delight
And not, thereby, be deemed of less account
Than he who keeps her daily in his sight.

XVII.

AH, spurn me not that in the world of men,
Among the wielders of the sword and pen
I have, as 'twere, detractors by the score,—
No! spurn me not for faults that I deplore
And fain would alter,—though, if I were wise,
I'd blunt the edge thereof in some disguise
Approved of thee! For I've a kind of hope
That we'll be friends again ere summer dies.

XVIII.

IF this be true I'll greet thee with such fire
That thou wilt throb thereat, as throbs a lyre,
And give thine answer, too, without restraint,
And neither frown at me nor fear a taint
In my much zeal, that knows not any pause
But, night and day, is constant to the laws
Of its own making, and is fain to prove
How leagued it is throughout to Honor's cause.

XIX.

I WILL conceal from thee no thought of mine.
All will be clear as signing of a sign
On marriage-scrips ; and, though I tell thee so,
The seas and streams of earth shall cease to flow
Ere thou shalt find, in this world or the next,
A lovè so proud, a faith so firmly sexed,
As this of mine. For thou'rt the polar star
To which I turn as minstrel to his text.

XX.

BUT woe's the hour ! My heart is wounded sore,
And soon may cease to take, as heretofore,
Such keen delight in tears that comfort not,
But evermore do seem to leave a blot
On sorrow's teaching ! Shall I muse thereon
One season more, till hope and faith be gone ?
Or must I look for comfort up in Heaven
And then be slain by thee as night by dawn ?



Tenth Litany.

GLORIA IN EXCELSIS.



Tenth Litany.

GLORIA IN EXCELSIS.



I.

O LOVE ! O Lustre of the sunlit earth
That knows thy step and revels in the worth
Of thy much beauty ! Is't thy will anew,
Famed as thou art, to marvel that I sue
With such persistence, and in such unrest,
Amid the frenzies of my passion-quest ?

Wilt look ungently, and without a tear,
On all the pangs I bear at thy behest ?

II.

MORNING and eve I cease not, when I kneel
To my Redeemer for my spirit's weal
And for my body's,—as becomes a man,—
Morning and eve I cease not in the span
Of all my days, O thou Unconquered One !
To pray for thee, and do what may be done

To re-acquire the friendship I have lost,
Which is the holiest thing beneath the sun.

III.

FOR what is fame that with so loud a voice
O'ersways the nations? What the random choice
Of sight and sound which makes the place we fill
So fraught with good, so redolent of ill?
Where is the thunderstorm of yesternight
That shook the clouds? And where the levin's blight
That spake of chaos and the Judgment Day?
And where the wisdom of a king's delight?

IV.

COULD I be kissed of thee, or crowned of men,
I'd choose the kiss. I'd be ordained then
Lord of myself, and not the slave I seem
To each new doubt!—Our tryste was like a dream
And yet 'twas true; for oft, by wonder-chance,
We find the path to many a bright romance,
And many a tilt and tourney of dear love
In which the brave are vanquished by a glance.

V.

To lie alone with thee one little hour,
And cling to thee as flower may cling to flower,
With no rough thought beyond the peace thereof,—
To be thy comrade, and to don and doff
The little chain that hangs about thy neck,—
To do all this, my Fair One! and to fleck
Thine eyes with kisses, were a righteous deed,
And not a thing for Love to hold in check.

VI.

NAY, there are dimples which I long to taste,
And there's a girdle fit for Phœbe's waist
Which I would loosen ; for I have the skill
To handle lilies ; and, by Venus' will,
I'd handle thee, and comfort thee therein.
For love's a sacrament I'd die to win,
And not a toy nor yet a subterfuge ;
And not a pitfall for the feet of sin.

VII.

THE searching suddenness of thy blue eyes,—
The flash thereof,—the fire that in them lies,—
All this I yearn to,—all the soul of thee
Shown in thy looks, as though to solace me
In some disaster portioned out as mine.
Where thou abidest, where thy limbs recline,
Where thou'rt absorbed in silence or in prayer,
There stands a throne, there gleams a fairy shrine.

VIII.

I AM, indeed, more subject to thy sway
Than trees are subject, in their tender way,
To earth's great king revolving round the sphere.
I am thy suffering servant all the year ;
And when I wake thy name is on my lips,
And when I sleep I feel thy finger-tips

Pressed on mine eyes, as if thy wraith were there,
To save my soul from night's entire eclipse.

IX.

TILL I have heard from thee my doom of death
I shall be proud to serve thee with my breath,
And with my labour, and be thine withal
As Man is God's,—content with any thrall
That's bound in thee,—content with any lot
That's linked with thine, in some secluded spot
Which thou hast loved, O Lady ! in the past,
And where remorse and wrong will find us not.

X.

To know thee fair, ah God ! how sweet is this ;
To find thee wavering, and to grasp in bliss
Only the dream of thee, how sad the while !
And yet, by reason of a moment's smile,
How grand to hope, how gracious to forget !
Thou false to me ? Thou heedless of a debt
Of love's incurring ? Nay, by Juno's crown,
Thy snow-white hand shall be my guerdon yet !

XI.

THE spirit-love that leads us to the soul
Athwart the body as its fairest goal,—
The love that lives in languor undefined
And yet is strong,—the love that can be kind
And yet aggressive as a soldier's blade,
Keen to the hilt, entranced and not afraid,—
This is the love that will survive the death
Of all endowments which the years have made.

XII.

WILT frown at this? Wilt chide me? Wilt appeal,
As some are wont, when lovers, out of zeal,
O'erstep the bounds of wisdom which hath ceased
To win men's praise? The Matins of the East
Sung by the lark,—the Credo of the Cloud
Which oft he trills in confirmation proud
Of his great love,—all this were mine excuse
If I could sing as he, so dawn-endowed.

XIII.

FOR I'd be welcome, then, where'er thou art,
And gladden thee and play as prompt a part
As Romeo played with Juliet at his breast.
Who loves not love, who hates to be caressed,
Is Nature's bane ; and I'll denounce him, too.
For he's a foe to all that's just and true

In earth and Heaven ; and when he seeks a joy,
His quest shall fail,—his hand shall miss the clue.

XIV.

WE know these things. We know how dark a word
May let in light, and how the smallest bird
May mix the morn with music till we think
The fire-lit air is wine for us to drink,—
And every drop salvation,—every sound
A Muse's whisper,—all the flower-full ground
A fancy-carpet fit for knights to tread
When on their way to Arthur's Table Round.

XV.

A FOOL, a fool is he who'll not up-raise
His hands in prayer, athwart the danger-days
Which come to all. For he, when waxen old,
Will search the past and find it callous-cold ;
And all the future, too, will freeze for him.
Nor shall he weep aright when tears bedim

His desperate, doleful eyes that know not faith ;
And he shall hear no chants of cherubim.

XVI.

I WAS bewitch'd of late ! My soul had met
Some fearful doom ; and there had dropt a threat,—
A curse belike,—from lips of Atropos.
There had been done a deed of spirit-loss
Which did o'erwhelm me as I paused thereat.
But now 'tis shunn'd ; and where a Tremor sat

Now sits a Hope ; and where a gulf was seen
Now stands a mount as grand as Ararat.

XVII.

THE rose is silent, and the lily dumb
For Man alone. He sees them when they come
Blest from the soil : but what they mean thereby,
And what they dream of, when they front the sky,
Eludes his learning. Yet the birds can tell.
Moths talk to flowers : and breezes in the dell

Hear more confessions than we men reveal ;
And oaks and cedars love each other well.

XVIII.

IN woodland places where the grass is lit
With lamp-like flowers, I seem to see thee flit
On azure wings, as if to bless the glade ;
For, everywhere, thy form in shine and shade
Doth come and go, conversant,—as I deem,—
With Nature's whims. For thou'rt of great esteem
In fairy haunts ; and elves and fays confess
How sweet thou art, my Love ! and how supreme.

XIX.

DIANA'S self was not more virgin-proud.
The maiden-moon, new-seated on a cloud
Which seems her throne where she receives the stars,—
The moon who holds her court beyond the jars
Of land and sea,—the moon, the vestal moon,
Has kept thee cold since the transcendant noon
Of that wild day when I thy hand did claim,
And when thy lips refusèd me their boon.

XX.

BUT thoughts are free ; and mine have found at last
Their apt solution : and, from out the past,
There seems to shine as 'twere a beacon-fire.
Yea, all the land is lit with large desire
Of lambent glory ; all the quivering sea
Is big with waves that wait the Morn's decree,
As I, thy vassal, wait thy beckoning smile
Athwart the splendors of my dreams of Thee !

GLADYS THE SINGER.



GLADYS THE SINGER.



Canto First.

YE who have known the pangs that lovers know,
The tears, the tremors, and the sovereign glow
Of some enthrallment fresh from Fairyland,
And, therewithal. the sprites, who in a band
Uphold, unseen, the courtship of true men,—
O ye bright souls ! for whom, with faltering pen,
I trace, e'en now, this tale of love and pride,
Accept, I pray you, safe and sanctified,
My lovers twain who fared not righteously !
For you have loved as they in their degree
And hoped as they, and sighed as they have done,
And sought the folly which is barred to none,
But stands and smiles and waits for us alway.
And lo ! I note the things that, day by day,
You guard and foster, with enraptured eyes.
And how you count the toys of your emprise :—
The keepsake-flower,—the curl that's passion-dear,—
The scented scroll that's read from year to year.

And while I note these things and muse thereon
I think of those sweet souls beyond the dawn
Whose love was flame. O deathless ! O ye dead !
Are ye well met ? Have ye no tears to shed
Not e'en for joy ? Is love not worth a kiss
Up there in Heaven ? A mere seraphic bliss
Fit for a saint ?—God help us then each one !—
And you, my brothers, you this side the sun,
Who love true-love, believe this much of me,
That I have worshipped Love upon my knee
And almost feared it. I have trembled too
In my much joy ! A glove,—a ribbon's hue,—
Have moved me strangely ; and in lonely hours,
In empty chambers, and in starlit bowers,
I have as 'twere enthroned a sainted Grief,
And paid it homage. Have you found relief
In tears and dreams,—as I have done full oft,—
And not been proud or perjured when, aloft,
A lark has seemed to trill the loved one's name ?
I pray you all, by Love's resistless flame,
Accept of me this tale which now is told.
For there's no shame in Truth ; and Hope's a-cold
That has no dreams to feed it. . . .

Far away

There stood, in years gone by, athwart the spray
That dashed the sea-born crags, a lordly tower ;
And, down the valley,—offshoot of its dower,—
A lowly cot embowered in such a nook
As lured Apollo when, with pipe and crook,
He wooed Acantha. And within its walls
A nymph was sheltered whom a Legend calls

Gladys the Singer,—one of those elect
And fond fair women whom the world has decked
With Dead Sea laurels.

He who owned the land
Was young and rich and lavish of his hand,
And well he knew the bower, aye ! as the kite
May know the dove-cot ; and a-down the height
He strode alone, one lustrous autumn-day,
Brain-sick with fancies such as warp the sway
Of Eros' children ; and his steps he turned
To where the cottage stood amid the burned
And withering foliage. But, beside the same,
He paused in doubt ; and, with a kindling shame,
Half glad, half sad, he heard a matin song
Sung, as it seemed, by One who did belong
To angel-choirs. And, as he drained the draught
Of that sweet voice,—as soul and body quaffed
The nectarous notes,—a something from his eyes
Fell like a film, and all the earth and skies
And all the frondage of the forest way
Re-took the raptures of the month of May.
And in his thought he roamed beside the stream
Where she had led him,—where the golden gleam
Of her bright hair had crowned the tender grace
Of her lithe body,—and her matchless face
Had made him mad ! For, vision-like, he stood
Alone with her in Heaven, and found it good,—
Found it the one sweet thing of all things known,
To sit with her at twilight, all alone,
In halcyon spots,—the universe their own.

A bowery nook, a sea-side lonely cave,
These were his haunts, and more he did not crave !
But now he loitered near the very shrine
Of this loved soul, and heard her voice divine
Peal out supreme.—He opened with a smile
The querulous door, and stood, a breathing-while,
Straight in her sight. . . .

She rushed into his arms
Tear-lit with joy, and glowing in the charms
Of white surrender : “ O my Love ! my Love !
So true, so gentle, so insured above
All time and distance ! I have yearned for thee
As earth for summer, as the lonely sea
For midnight stars ; and now thou’rt here at last,
I mean to cling to thee, and hold thee fast,
Aye ! as a chain might do, I mean to cling
Fast round thy soul, and sphere thee like a ring.
What ! not one word ? And gloomy, too, and chill,
On this bright day ? O Roland ! thou art ill,
And wilt not tell me ! Thou’rt convulsion-pale,
And in thy gaze I read the dismal tale
Of some foreboding. O my dearest one !
My life, my death, my All beneath the sun !
In God’s good name I charge thee make it clear
What makes thee sad ? And if thou need a tear
Seek it in me,—for I have learnt the way
To shed more tears than thou wilt need to-day.”

“ Nay, Gladys, nay ! ” with smiles he answered her,
“ ’Tis much ; ’tis nothing ! Some unwonted stir
In household matters.—Words are empty things.
Why should they hurt ? If Faithfulness had wings

'Twould quit me now ; 'tis here, and thou art She.
Nay, sit thee down, and I will yield to thee
My sure confession."

Gladys, with a look
Half frown, half smile, obeyed him ; yet she shook
As shakes an aspen when the winds are hushed,
And all the meadow-lands are sunset-flushed.
And he ? Remorse was with him ; and apart
He stood absorbed. Should he consult his heart ?
Or serve ambition ? He had won the soul
Of this sweet woman, and to his control
His words had swayed her. Should he put to scorn
The threats and frets and sneers which, all the morn,
Had marred his peace ?—Aye ! should he, as a knight
In olden time had done for his delight,
Accept, revere, enshrine, and re-endow
This blue-eyed wonder with his marriage-vow ?
He stilled a sigh, and turned to her, and spake :—
" Thou know'st, O Gladys ! for thine honour's sake,
And for thyself that art as Heaven to me,
I would not break the oath which unto thee
My lips have sworn. But I, too long I fear,
Have stood between thy life and that career
Which waits for thee,—as Silence in the dales
Waits, after dark, for songs of nightingales !
I should have warned thee. In my heart I knew
That tedious hours, and sorrows, not a few,
Would be thy meed, if here thou didst prolong
Thy tell-tale absence from the world of song."

She heard abashed. Was he indeed possessed
Of foregone knowledge, though so late confessed ?

Or was he wearied of their sylvan bliss?
She mused an instant in the fear of this;
And then, without a sign, she drooped her head
And wept outright,—such tears as children shed
When, 'mid a storm, they hear their parents pray.

Women are stronger than we care to say,
And when they weep they conquer more than men
With sword or sceptre; for they bind us then
With weak, warm hands, as with a festal wreath.
Let those who draw the sword from out its sheath,
And those who sit and stare on gilded thrones,
Beware of Woman! She, in all the zones
And all the courts of earth, and all its bowers,
Is queen elect of all the golden hours.
She is the ruler whom the rulers know,
And when she wills a thing, in joy or woe,
In health or sickness, or remorse or sin,
The high-born knight must bow to her therein.
'Twas so to-day when, with a mute caress,
She spake her trust, and, clothed in courtliness,
Made known her fears,—and this with such a mien,
And such sweet fervour, and so bright a sheen
Of pout and blush, that, for a moment's space,
He gazed, relenting, on her radiant face,
And loathed himself; and trembled at her glance,
And vowed to God that his was evil chance
To do this thing, and in his very shame
To fear to name it, though in Honour's name.

He eyed her face, the brighter for the rush
Of those quick tears; and kissed away the blush
That warmed her cheek as with a rose's stain,
And then re-kissed it to its place again.

So weak she seemed and yet so strong withal,
And so exacting, that, within her thrall,
Man as he was, he felt the force in him
Melt into misery, and a tear bedim
His traitorous gaze ; for he was one of those
Who fear the scoffs of beauty more than blows.
But she could mark the menace and the drift
Of thoughts unuttered, and her soul could sift
Sound from the sense thereof ; and thus she
spake :

“O Roland ! O my Master ! for thy sake
I have been stabbed by doubts and lain awake
Night after night, to dream of wayward things,—
A moth’s lament, a flower with folded wings,
An April daisy turned into a screen
For elfin lovers, and the face serene
Of my dead sister, who, though like to me
As flakes of snow are like the foam at sea,
Would thrust me back, full soon, could she behold
My fall’n estate, and all my promise-gold
Turned into dust,—I mean the pride I had
In mine own self, ere doting made me mad.
Ah, gracious God ! how glad were I to pass,
Young as I am, beneath the churchyard grass,
If, but an instant, ere I went that way,
I might re-win the right I had to pray !”

But he, soft-smiling, gazed on her, and stood
Silent apace, as one, within a wood,
Haunted by pixies at the swooning-hour
Of birds and bushes, when the moon has power.
Aye ! as a man entranced, when night is done,
May note the world’s betrothal to the sun,

E'en so he watched her, with a pent-up sigh,
And thus addressed her :—"Thou'rt too young to die,
And much too fair. Who knows it more than thou?
But mark me, Sweet One ! for I lie not now,
Nor have I lied to thee at any time,
Or wronged in thought the holy wedding chime,
Or spurned an oath, or feared a promise-ring.
No ! I have thought no lie, nor would I bring
Sorrow to thee or shame, or make thee rue
The rapt confession of thine eyes of blue,
When first I saw thee in the Long-Ago
Of this year's May, as blameless as the snow
Which makes its eyrie on a mountain's crest.
Beauty is thine and Music, and the quest
For power and wealth and all the joys of fame
And all the rhapsodies that, round a name,
Burst into splendour to possess a world !
Glory is thine, and on thy lips impearled
A smile so sweet, so lustrous in its mirth,
That none has known, till now, upon the earth,
A dream so true, a joy so fair to see."

"A dream,—a joy? Ah, thou canst flatter me !"
She rippled forth, in answer to his speech,
"But I am here, to hide me, out of reach,
If thou upbraid me,—as I know thou wilt,—
For my much trust,—itself a kind of guilt.
Am I attaint, or guiltless in thy sight,
For my day-dreams ?"

He answered her aright :—
"I am not worthy of so grand a boon
As thy great love ; for not the sun and moon,

And not the stars, in all their course, have known
Such gem-like joy ; and I would fain atone,
If thou permit me, by a prompt assent
To all thy dreams, for Art's aggrandisement ;
Aye ! have thee robed, and see thee crowned again,
As Music's Queen,—returned to her domain."

"Music's domain?" she cried. "Nay, that is
done.

For lo ! I love thee as a kneeling nun
Loves, in the circuit of her little cell,
The pictured face of Christ who conquered Hell.
E'en so I love thee, Sweetheart ! and I swear,
By God's own mouth, and by His auburn hair,
That I will slay thee if thou'rt false to me !"
Therewith she flushed as red as roses be
And sprang to him, and quavered in her voice.
"O Love !" she cried, "O Roland ! O my Choice !
Sorrow be mine, not thine, if I offend.
It seems I vex thee ! Shall I make an end,
Here, in this place, with this thy jewelled knife,
At once of loving and of loveless life ?
Winter is wild. The storm may want a wife.
And I am friendless as a foundering ship !
The hours recoil ; the monstrous moments slip
Fast through my fingers, while I count the beads
Of my poor life,—the rosary of my deeds
Good, bad, and selfish. and the joy therein
Which oft I found, undaunted by the sin,—
If sin it be,—which brought me to thy side.
I loved thee, Roland ! as, at eventide,
The lowly daisy, in her hood of green,
Loves the set sun,—and keeps her face unseen

Through all the drowsy hours of sainted night,
Till dawn restores the Loved One to her sight.
Oh ! I can drown, or, like a broken lyre,
Be thrown to earth, or cast upon a fire.
I can be made to feel the pangs of death,
And yet be constant to the quest of breath,—
Our poor, pale trick of living through the lies
We name Existence, when that ‘something’ dies
Which we call Honour. Many and many a way
Can I be struck, or fretted, night and day,
In some new fashion, or condemned the while
To take for food the semblance of a smile,
The left-off rapture of a slain caress,
And ‘Yes’ for ‘No,’ and ‘No’ perchance for ‘Yes.’
Ah ! well I see, of comfort there is none,
And no completion of the faith begun,
When moon and star, and swift-ascending sun,
Brought joy to me, and made me, as I wis,
The thing I am, soul-famished for a kiss.”

He raised her hand, and kissed it, as a king,
For some cold vow, might do so staid a thing.
But as he kissed her,—careful as the snow
Which falls on flowers,—she frowned, and murmured
low :—

“Too kind,—good Sir !” and dashed away a tear,
And waved him back, as mindful to appear
Nor grave nor gay, nor bashful in her mind ;
And, far away, the wailing autumn wind
Sobbed o’er the sea, alone and unconfined,—
Like some poor lover, whom the nights and days
Have robbed alike of triumph and of praise.

“O friend!” he answered, “I am much to blame.
I taught thee this; I taught thee how to name
Sorrow and sin and suffering; and for thee
I brought myself to sue, aye! on my knee,
To my proud sire. O Gladys! wouldst thou guess,
His rude retort, his smile of bitterness?
Nay, hear me, Gladys!”

With a frown she drew
A quick, hot breath, and looked him through and
through,
And then replied:—“I gave thee all I had,—
My youth, my truth, my life, and all things glad,
All thoughts of love, all hopes of peace to come,
And only kept away my sorrows’ sum,—
My tears and fears and sighs, and all the shame
That burnt the bays of what I deemed my fame.
If still remembered in the world of men,
If honoured still beyond this desert-glen
Where now we’ve met, I care not. I am dead
To all delights with which my soul I fed,
And all ambitions in the realm of art,
And all the fond desires that were a part
Of my young life, before I came to thee.”

“What need,” he answered, “here beside the
sea,
Where Art and Nature have the world for friend,
What need, my Love! of tears that come to end
Full soon for lovers,—and for women first?
What need hast thou for rancour, or for thirst
Of things withheld unkindly,—who shall say!—
Or hid from sight, or haply kept away

For some good purpose ?” And he bent his head
And moved his lips, and, with a word unsaid,
Looked at her straight.

“ O God !” she stammered out,
“ Can such things be ? Nay, Sir, beyond a doubt,
You men are just ; but, by your tardy leave,
We women, too, may learn, while we deceive,
To preach like you !—’Twas Adam tempted Eve !
He bade her eat. He tempted her to fall,
And then denounced her !” And, with this recall
Of her past life, she lifted up her face,
As one who sees a snake a-near the place
She thought secure ; and flashed a proud disdain
On his mute wonder and the look of pain
With which he eyed her ; and she spake again :—
“ Men have their rights, I know, and thou hast
thine,
To break the bowl and squander all the wine !
But tell me, quick, thy father’s final word,
And what, in shame, to-day thine ears have heard ?”

His faltering lips made answer to her quest :—
“ He was unjust, and stern, and ill at rest,
But clear, emphatic, certain of his power.
‘ Thou must dismiss,’ he said, ‘ this very hour,
All thoughts of love till I permit the same.’
And, with a cold aspersion on thy fame,
He wrung my heart with words I will not name.”

Sudden as fire she started to her feet :
“ And thou ?” she cried, “ Thine answer to the heat
Of this distemper ?” Like a craven man
He hung his head, and blushed as he began

Some stuttering words. "I am controlled," he said,

"By claims of kindred, which the quick and dead
Alike have bowed to. For my father's sake,
For mine and his, I must at once partake
Of his fell purpose, and restore thy troth,
And claim of thee mine own mistaken oath,
This, and no less."

"No less?" she swift replied.

"This,—and no less? Well, well, I must have died

Some time to-day! I must have met my death
Some minutes since, or, with thy cruel breath,
Thou hadst not dared,—in presence of my corse,—
To rack my soul with word of this divorce.
But leave me quickly, for the dead are proud,
And murdered oaths are safest in a shroud!
I hate thee, Roland! and my hate is such
I would not soil my finger with a touch
Of thy white body, though to touch it now
Made me an Empress. O thou traitor, thou!
Traitor to me and mine,—if mine there be
In days hereafter,—O thou sad-to-see,
And dark and dread pale spectre of the thing
I loved and feared and revered as a king!
Nay, I have eyes. I see thee. I can trace
The coward blush that lurks about thy face,
And fears its colour,—fears to show itself,
Lest it should wear the livid look of pelf,
Or mark thy cheek with some detested blot.
I know thy purpose, though thou tell it not:

To wed hereafter,—for Ambition's sake,—
Some high-born dame with gold enough to slake
Thy thirst of power."

He made a quick retort :

"No bride for me, in good or ill report,—
In all the round of all my nights and days."
But with a withering look she met his gaze,
As she would stab him with that very knife
Whereof she spake, ere yet a word of strife
Had sprung between them ; and she raised her head
And flashed contempt. "Thou art some serf," she
said,

"Stol'n in the night from some marauder's shed,
And made to take the place,—a place belied,—
Of son and heir,—a castle's foolish pride !
But One who knows all things beneath the sun
Hath frowned on thee, and sees what thou hast done ;
And all thy heart is bared to Him to-day,
And all thou say'st,—and all thou still wouldst say."

She paused an instant with a weary thought
That he might scatter all her doubts to nought,—
All her distress, and all the throbs of pain
That worked within her ; and she spake again :—
"O thou dried soul whom once I deemed a man,
Monarch of men, and mine for all the span
Of our two lives, in this world and the next,
O thou weak boaster of a brainless text,
Fitter to fill a trench than be the curse
Of one more summer, or to move me worse
Than now thou mov'st me ! Nay, I hate thee not.
Who hates the worm ? Who hates the canker-blot

On some poor tree? I see thee as thou art.
I sound thy depths. I read thee to the heart.
I find thee shallow as a clamorous rill
That wends its way, uncalled for, down a hill!"

As thus she spake, his face from white to red,
And red to white, as of a man half dead,
Grew famine-featured while he looked at her,
And owned the mastery and the fitful spur
Of her wild anger; and was nigh to sue
For absolution, as his passion-due.
But, like a standard-pole whose flag is down,
Or like the base usurper of a crown,
He stood erect, and, clothed in his deceit,
Eyed her aghast, as one who would retreat
In some sleek way, if, ere proceeding thence,
He might be pardoned for his Love's offence.

"One word!" she answered to his mute appeal,
"One further word!" And then, as she would
reel,

Or swoon, or die, or do some deadly thing,
She clutched the air, as men at sea may cling,
Wrecked as they are, to some discarded rope.
She ached towards him with a kind of hope,
And then dismissed it, and in accents weak,
And tears held back, continued thus to speak:—

"Thou know'st all women well,—thou oft hast
said;
Thou know'st not *me*. Go, know thyself instead,—
What man thou art, how false and how unjust
To Nature's test, and Knighthood's holy trust.
I loved thee not! I loved a foolish dream
That looked like thee. I saw thee in the gleam

Of some bright thought ; I deemed thee such an one
As minstrels sing of, when they drape the sun,
And make him Man, to crown him with a crown !
Thou wast the flower of all the world's renown
In my glad sight ; but now, to see thee there,
I seem to see the wraith of some despair,—
A thing so rude, so robber-like in plan,
I would not have thee for my serving-man !
Aye, aye, 'tis so !—I swear by God's delight
When with His hand He parted day and night,
And by the stars, and by the saints of heaven,
That I repent me of my girlhood given
To thy rude touch ! All evil thee beset,
Thou blight of morning ! All remorse and shame
Possess thy soul, and sap the ancient fame
Of thy great house ! I was too frail a thing,
Too quickly won,—too impotent to sting,—
A fair-haired frailty with attractive eyes,—
A doll,—a puppet,—something from the skies
For thy caressing, and belike in time
For thy denouncing, as a minute's crime
Done up in silk ! But should'st thou, for thy peace,—
If peace it be,—should'st thou, ere autumn cease,
Require a toy, a heart to play withal,
An unwed wife to answer to thy call,—
Say I was proud, and spurned thee from my side ;
Say that the love between us snapped and died,
As dies a tune, as snaps the strained chord
Of some wild harp,—too weak to be restored.
Nay ! say this, too : I claim no part in thee,
For I would liefer trust a wave at sea,

A pent-up fire, a raging famished bear,
Than thy false heart !—I loved thy raven hair ;
I hate it now. I loved thy hand so white,
Thy face, thy form,—thy flattery, day and night,—
And thy dark eyes and alabaster brow ;
Be God my witness how I hate them now ! ”

He stood transfixed ; he quivered as he heard ;
He made as he would speak some ruffian word,
Some word uncased by torture from his soul,
Beyond the boundaries of his blood's control.
But with a groan he conquered this intent,
And smiled on her, as some reflex is sent
From westward skies, at waning of the day,
When winds of winter spurn the clouds away.
“ Let us be friends,” he urged, with lifted head,
“ For Love's sweet sake, for Love that was not
dead

That night in June !—for Love that lured us on
To deeds that wrecked us on the shores of dawn !
E'en for that love, I say, be generous now,
And grant some liking, though the Fates allow
Small time for rapture. Say ! shall this be done,
And we forget the dream that made us One ? ”

“ Hence ! Quit my sight ! ” she cried ; and with her
hand

She waved him back,—white-heated fair and grand,
As some sweet lady whom a clown has vexed,—
“ Away,—thou boor ! ”

One moment, and the next,
He stood full-height ; and then, with half a stare,
And half a scowl, out-sauntered in the air.

"She must be mad," he thought. And, slow, retraced
His measured steps, athwart the shingly waste.
But she leapt forward, like a stricken deer,
With one great cry, brow-beaten in her fear,
And yet transformed to something half divine.
For Love had torn the darkness for a sign,
And, sharp within her soul, a something stirred
Like wounded wings of some imprisoned bird.

"Come back ! Come back !" she cried, and open
flung

The near-shut window, where the roses hung
In their torn wreaths, "Come back and learn from me
What no man knows,—what haply unto thee
May bring content." But, shuddering tamely there,
The wild cry fell ; and through her gold-like hair
Her face looked out as on a winter's night
The icy moon looks down through vapours white.
"Come back !" she cried to that retreating form
Which heard her not ; and weird, and wan, and
warm,

She craned her neck to note the path he took,
And swayed herself, as sways beside a brook
A lonely willow on a breathless day ;
And with her lips she made as she would say :—
"I was thy faithful wife, though wed in sport
As wives were wedded once in Arthur's court.
Yet heed my plea ! Two hearts are knit in one
In my poor frame."

But utterance found she none ;
And, ere ecstatic she could shape the words,
And waft them forth as Summer wafts the birds,

For joy, for memory, or for grief's control,
Her face convulsed, and o'er her tottering soul
The storm-cloud burst ; and tears shut out the light.

And so it came to pass, in her despite,
That he ignored the secret, sad and sweet,
Wherewith she ached at every pulse's beat ;
And, later on, the breezes told the flowers
How One who must have wept for many hours
Fled through the wood. It was some sprite,—they
said,—

A nymph, a naiad,—One who, as she fled,
O'er-ruled her grief, and watched, with aching sight,
The blood-red moon go down into the night.

Canto Second.

AGAIN the spring-time with its songs of love
Had come and gone ; again the cooing dove
Had called its nestling on the sheenful breeze ;
Again the waves of the careering seas
Assailed the coast with shouts of wild acclaim,
What time the winter-wind, in ocean's name,
Hurled out defiance ; and the queen of heaven,
The maiden-moon, entranced or in a swoon,
Paced up the sky, from autumn unto spring,
Unclaimed of men, uncrowned of any king,
And only loved aright by loveless maids.
And once again the rapture of the glades,—
The rout and revel of the spring-decades,—
Had filled and thrilled the air with such delight
As makes a tourney of the day and night
When gale confronts with gale at equinox,
And all the cliffs, and all the seaward rocks
Have thuds of joy ! Again the forest yearned
For sight of summer, and the roses burned
On many a hedge, whereon the mounting sun
Put forth his trophies. For the world had won
The right to cling thereto, as, golden-fleeced,
The rapt Hyperion leapt from out the East.

Earth and the sky had called him ; and the land
Had smiled, expectant ; and the ocean-strand
Had bared her bosom to the sun's caress ;
And wind and wave had counted tress on tress
Of his long hair, and made a chant thereof
Warm, aye ! and wanton as the songs of love
Which all men know. And soft the breezes crept
From rock to rock, where over-night had slept
A white sea-fog, and where, in summer days,
The blue hare-bell would sound the Maker's praise
In chimes unheard by pedants, but aright
Guessed at by bards.—The hill was all alight
With blazing furze, that keeps the sun in sight,
And seems to thrill with sunshine after dark ;
And, far away, the lilting of the lark,
The prophet-bird, the singer of the dawn,
Invested Heaven, as if its mate had gone
Straight through the sky, and must be ravished
back.

And lo ! dishevelled, on the upland track,
A weary woman with a load of joy,—
A Phœban gift,—a bright-eyed baby-boy,
With clustering curls ! And she who bore the child
Was fair and comely, though with something wild
In her blue eyes, and something in her gait
That spoke of watchfulness endured of late,
As if the ghost of terror had pursued
Her faltering steps, and agony, at feud
With fairer things, had sapped within her mind
The girlish thoughts that linked her with her kind.

“ Here let us rest,” she sighed, as on a knoll
She bent her down, “ and I will ease my soul

Of half its weight, and ease my body, too,
Of its fond burden. For I tell thee true,
Mine own sweet babe ! that, in this heart of mine.
Are tears unnumbered, sharper than the brine
Of salt sea-winds, and fiercer than the flames
Of crater fires ; and there are fitful names,—
If I could find them,—for my many blames.
Dost see, my Roland ! yonder on the ridge,
This side the forest, near the broken bridge,
That princely tower ? The keys thereof are ours,—
If we demand them,—all the roofs and towers,
Yea, all the landscape, all the shining land,
All ours for ever, if we lift a hand.
But shall we lift it ? Shall we make appeal
To one who hates us,—one who will not kneel
For God's high quittance,—and, beyond his pelf,
Has nought to love, or pray for, but himself ?”

While thus she parleyed with the tender elf
Who called her “Mother,” and was all she had
This side eternity, to keep her glad.
Shudders oppressed her, and there came a sound
Of leaves and twigs in ear-shot of the mound
Where she was throned. And lo ! towards her
came
A faggot-woman, old and cold and lame,
Who seemed the ghost of some dead winter's day
Returned to life, to lead the world astray,
And mar good thoughts.

The beldam looked at her,
And snarled, aggressive, as a famished cur

Which no man loves. "Wilt do a deed for me,"
The girl inquired, "and earn an honest fee
This heyday morn? I see thou wilt do this ;
For thou art pleased, as when a dream of bliss
Comes to a child. Aye ! aye ! the world is sad.
I know 'tis so ! But gold will make thee glad."
With this she tore a leaflet from a book,
And wrote as follows, while her bosom shook
With fears untold :—

"If thou remember now
A dream long dead,—a broken, foolish vow,—
A poor, pale ghost who, in the years gone by,
Was known as Gladys,—quit thy turret high,
And seek, this day, the place thou knowest well :
The Witches' Cave, the ante-room of Hell,—
If Heaven and Hell be one thing and the same,
And hope a snare, and misery but a name !
I have a lustrous jewel here with me
Which bears thy mark ; a thing so fair to see
That many a man of pride would sell for this
All things he hath, and all his chance of bliss
In worlds far off. But yet, oh ! read me right,
And heed me well. This is no fool's delight,
And no poor treasure from the marts of men,
Which now I speak of ; for a poet's pen,
A painter's brush, a sculptor's art divine,
Alone were fit to vaunt this gem of mine.
A rapturous burst of music at a shrine
Might make it clear, and earth would under-
stand !
But I must place it in a surer hand

Than this I write with ; and I pray thee now,
If thou remember still a midnight vow
Which once was thine,—which God and I alone
Heard thee pronounce, albeit in under-tone,—
Come with the dame ; but come as comes a man
Who clears a path for Cæsar in the van
Of utmost truth.”

Herewith she tied the scrip,
And kissed it fondly with revering lip,
As one, in prayer, may kiss a holy thing,—
And therewithal she smiled as dryad Spring
May smile on Winter when the months are young,
And re-addressed, with her persuading tongue,
That aged dame :—“Go, take with thee, I pray,
This scroll I give thee, and in haste convey
To yonder tower. Its master knows I’m here,
And he will come to where the sea-weed sere
Thrills to the blast, and hisses to the sea :—
But make no further talk of mine or me,
Save this alone :—Thou’st seen me on my way
To find a cavern where, from day to day,
Strange things were planned. He knows what I
would say !

Hence, then, and quickly ; and return with him.”

The ancient woman, cold in every limb
And twitched by palsy, with a feeble laugh,
Made mouths at her, and fumbled with her staff,
And named high God ! The world’s a-full of such :—
Women and men, unseemly to the touch,
Unkempt, uncanny, girt about with woe,
And smirched with mud, who yet are proud to know

Some far-off Duke, who threatens them with a rod
And claims their toil. E'en so she talked of God !

But when she'd gone that other caught the boy
Quick in her arms as one may catch a toy,
And called it "King," and "Sweetheart," and enlaced
Her fair fond arms around him, tender-faced ;
And he whose eyes in rapture seemed to float
Caught at the chain that pended from her throat,
And played therewith, and seized, and opened wide,
A golden trinket, where a face of pride
Looked out in smiles, as faces in a dream
Invest the darkness and absorb the beam
Of some set sun ; and thus that woman fair
Resumed her talk, and covered with her hair
The baby-face which looked into her own :—
"He is thy father, child ! though all unknown,
Thine unkind father who, in summers flown,
Made me his plaything ! Oh, he'll make thee great,
And treat thee as a lord of high estate !
There ! weep not, Sweet ! My tears are foolish
ones.

All hopes are sound ; all fathers love their sons.
And thine will love thee when he comes to-day
And scans thy face, and mine so far away !"

These latter words she spoke beneath her breath ;
And as she paused a pallor, like to death,
Came o'er her face. There seemed to surge to her
The far-off sound of some sea-sepulchre,
The thud of waters, and the thrill of tides
In lonely haunts, where Ocean over-rides
Her ghastly wrecks.

She swooned into herself,
With eyes out-staring to a broken shelf—
Of piled-up cloud, on which the sun had smiled ;
And then, with feverous haste, she snatched the
child

Forth from its couch among the flow'rets fair,
And bore it seaward, and was quickly there
In that same nook whereof she wrote the name,—
The Witches' Cave,—the landmark of a shame
She loved more dearly when the worst was known
Than halcyon bards, or kings upon a throne,
Love their dominions ; and within the niche,
All poor with weeds, she placed the jewel rich
Whereof she spake.

The child into a trance
Of loveliest sleep had fall'n ; and now, askance
She gazed upon it, as she wrapped it round
In her red scarf, and laid a packet bound
With golden thread beside it ; and, with tears,
Kissed it in silence,—lest the dimpled fears,
There hushed in slumber, should awake to pry
And thwart her purpose.

Ah ! 'twere sweet to die,
To save from drowning, or to snatch from fire
This life-long treasure ; but, in penance dire,
To leave it thus ? To thrust it on its sire,
And then to shun it ? And for what ? A dream,—
A chance,—a hope,—a certitude,—a beam
Of far-off light ! “ He will be poor,” she thought.
“ If I live on ; but rich, and richly taught,

And fondly cared for, if I die for him.
So let me fare, O God ! where none may dim
Dead people's eyes, and let Thy will be willed,
E'en as the tempest in the night was stilled
At Thy Son's coming ! " And she bowed her head,
And wept afresh, as weeps, when day is dead,
A sunset cloud ; and, shuddering and abysed
In her own soul, re-touched the child and kissed,
With desolate dull moaning of wild pain ;
And, like a woman with the curse of Cain
Full in her heart, out-leapt into the sun
And sought the ocean.

All her hair undone,
And pale and proud, with bosom-folded hands,
She stood in water on the woeful sands,
And, ankle-deep, surveyed the glittering sea,
What time the wind uprose upon the lea.
" O God ! " she murmured, as she waded in,
" Take Thou my soul ; absolve me of my sin,
And make me fit to join, when I am gone,
The ranks of those who wait, unfrowned upon.
In deathful shades, in hope to reconcile
Their clamorous past with Thine eternal smile ! "

She turned her gaze to shoreward, and awhile
Shed tears that scathed her, as they struggled through
Their eyelids' fringe ; and, for a space or two,
She paused inert. " I will be brave," she said,
And journeyed on, " I will confront the dead,
In true-love fashion ! I will smile to-day,
And sing the songs of madness born in May,

The mirth of madness when the world was young,
And flower and field and ford had found a tongue ;
And each created thing had tuned its voice
To praise its Maker. For I die by choice.
I go to meet the ghosts of my despairs,
My murdered hopes, my unregarded cares !
No man has wrought my death !—no woman's guile
Has seared my soul."

Then,—with a kind of smile
That twitched her mouth and saddened all her face,
She sang the song of Death's abiding-place :
A song of sorrow which, in days gone by,
Her lute had thrilled to,—sigh with cadence-sigh
New knit in chorus. But to-day the sea,
The wind-struck sea, made all its chords agree
With that one rapture ; and the sounds thereof
Were sad to hear as sighs that speak of love.

SONG.

I.

THERE is a land beyond the rising moon,
A land of peace which all the angels know ;—
A floating wonder, like a dream of June,—
The joys whereof will greet me in my swoon.

II.

A white sea-bird, a sea-gull overhead,
Will chirp at me to twit me with a doubt,
But I shall smile upon my foamful bed,
And all the waves will know that I am dead.

III.

The sun, all day, will see me where I go,
And, one by one, the stars will peep at me,
And I shall soon be whitened like the snow,
And weird and wild with wandering to and fro.

By this the water, bubbling to her knees,
Broke into ripples, which the venturous breeze
Edged as with lace,—so dainty was the foam.
A wintry wind had combed it like a comb ;
But this light breeze, careering o'er the spray,
Turned it to silver 'mid the roundelay
Of that lone creature on her foam-ward way.

SONG.

I.

O LOVE, my Master, O my Chosen One,
O thou to whom my thoughts, to-day, are turned !
I stand out here with all my cravings done,
And all my fevers quenched beneath the sun.

II.

I am not mad ; nor am I,—as I seem,—
The ghost of gladness or the bane thereof.
I hear the shouts of men as in a dream,
And, far away, the sea-bird's sudden scream.

III.

I am the wicked rose that loved the Dark,
And lost its colour, aye ! its blushing power,

And therewithal its kinship to the lark !
I am the night-wind's, and I bear its mark.

But now the water,—clamouring to the ends
Of her long hair,—appeared to make amends
For its late calm ; and lashed her on the side.
It was the buffet of the clamorous tide,
The full tide, ebbing now, that sought the sea,
As late the beach was sought,—a moment's glee
Whipped into foam ! But, unaffrayed at this,
She smiled and said :—" It was an ocean-kiss ;
This, and no more." And, with an aching heart,
She sang,—with rapture that was once a part
Of her stage life,—by men remembered well,—
The silvery cadence of her ocean-knell.

SONG.

I.

O SWEET, my Son ! my darling ! dead to me,
But saved for him, as flowers are saved for God ;
How like a fête-day will thy finding be
When I'm at rest out yonder in the sea.

II.

Thou art the one sweet thing on all the earth,
The pride of summer and the winter's balm ;
A glimpse of Heaven,—a glory from thy birth,—
Without a peer in sadness or in mirth.

III.

Had I a thousand lives instead of one,
 A thousand deaths to die to cancel thine,
 I'd give them all, aye ! freely as a nun
 Gives all she hath for great Jehovah's Son.

And, fever-fraught, with wildly streaming hair,
 She tossed these notes ecstatic through the air.

SONG.

I.

THIS is the end of all my many fears,
 And this the charter of my right to die,—
 To seek a solace out beyond the spheres,
 And kill the scandals of my twenty years.

II.

This is my penance, this ! and my delight,
 To sail the deep for searching of a tomb,
 And, through the mirk, the madness of the night ! . . .

.

Up to the waist she stood in that expanse
 Of wan sea-water, piteous in her glance,
 And weary-limbed, and shuddering to the soul.
 For, far away, she eyed the ocean-goal
 Whereto she thirsted with so wan a lip,—
 The straight sea-line whereto a fleecy ship

E'en now made way with homeward-sailing men ;
And all the blood within her faltered then.
" Shall I go back," she thought, " and claim my boy,
And dare the worst of all the world's annoy,—
And front his father, and confide in him ?
Shall I do this, and turn me from the rim
Of this dark wave, now bearing full on me,
And seek a dwelling far from any sea,
Unknown to him ? "

She staggered from the wave
That reeled about her like a rolling grave,
And swerved aside to give it passage clear.
" O God ! " she mused, half palsied in her fear,
" I have o'erstepped my doom ; and now for this
I shall be tumbled in the seething hiss
Of tides tumultuous, and a Nothing be,
A wide-eyed Nothing on the doubtful sea ! "

Therewith she met the breakers' dark advance,
Which seemed to tilt and turn to her, askance.
And one of these assailed her with the shocks
Of foam-fed wrath, and hurled her on the rocks
And dragged her down, low-gurgling in the strain
Of imminent death, and roared at her amain ;
And made more havoc of her shining hair
Than lovers' hands which murder while they spare :
Wild, wanton hands of wooers like the one
For whom, to-day, she died beneath the sun,
In fierce enthrallment. But she rose anew
Prone on her back, aghast, and pale of hue,

And out to sea,—a lifeless thing, and mild,
With oozing lips, and eyes that ever smiled,
She slowly drifted,—soon to face the stars,
And soon to front the moon athwart the bars
Of feathery cloud and opal-tinted mist ;—
But nevermore on earth should she be kissed,
And nevermore be seen in any lands,
And nevermore be touched by baby-hands !

Meantime the child abandoned in the cave
Lay locked in slumber, spared by wind and wave,
And snugly-housed as birds are, in the bliss
Of their nest-thrall, though near a precipice,
Or rock-suspended in an Alpine wood.
And lo ! at entrance of the cave there stood
A silent man, with white and wistful face,
Who seemed to know the secrets of the place
And all the hopes which lit it, lantern-wise.

He paused an instant, and, with eager eyes,
Peered in the grot, but saw no woman there,
Only the child, which gave him stare for stare,
And clenched its fist, new-wakened out of sleep ;
And, as he entered, he was like to weep
With thoughts contentious.

He undid the scroll,
And read these words : “ O Roland ! O my soul !
Lord of my life, my Liege, my King of Men !
If thou be he who met me in the glen,
And not a dream, a phantom, or a fiend,
Accept of me this boy that I have screened
From birth till now, and take him to thyself,
And love him as a Ghibeline, or Guelf,

May love his heir. Our Saviour said, of old,
'Forbid them not !' and took into His fold
All tender babes, and blessed them with His steven,
And called them God's elect, the loved of Heaven,
Whom none on all the earth should drive away
From His anointing, nightly or by day !
In life I erred ; in death I make it clear
How much I loved thee,—more than honour dear,
And more than wealth, which is the bane of youth,
When, canker-like, it makes a lie a truth,
And truth a lie, and hope a thing morose.
I am not brave ; and yet, if one so close
To Death's domain may dare to speak of Life,
I know not fear. I am the Ocean's wife.
I am the wife of every wanton wave
That cares to touch me, though it will not save.
Yet hear, oh, hear my plea ! My time will come.
This babe of ours will speak when I am dumb,
This baby-face entreat thee, with a smile,
To think of me, and pray for me the while,
As one enduring things that will endure.
And, O my Love ! of this, at least, be sure :—
I love thee still,—for I will call thee mine
One moment more ! The place beyond the brine,
The place that I shall know when I am dead,
Will not affright me when my breath is sped.
And lo ! I ask thy pardon ere I die.
Meekly I crave it. For I made reply
In words unseemly ; and I pray thee now
Forget, forgive ! All wrongs I disallow ;
Yea, all my griefs, and all the blame thereof,
And all the pangs that seemed to wait on love.

Oh, heed me, Roland ! Heed me, and, to-day
Let me be glad, and cast my doubts away
As all unfit to share my dreams of thee.
And do thou pause ere thou condemn in me
The headlong fault which guides me. Is't a sin ?
If so, God help me ! Is't a fury-din
Of mere mad waves, and no assured repose
Beyond all these ? I know not ; for the shows
Of life and death and darkness touch me not,
As oft they touched me ere I trod the spot
Of our first meeting. But I yearn at last
To this one hope,—new-looming from the past,—
That thou'lt remove all scandal from the boy,
When,—by my death,—I rid thee of annoy
Henceforth for ever ! He will win his peace
And thou thy comfort ; and, till summers cease,
And winters weary of their woeful chace,
He will be thine. Oh ! when he grows apace
Let him be shown the picture of my face,—
The face I wore when I was loved of thee,—
And say I died, unhurt, beside the sea,
Not in the sea itself,—'twould injure him
To know too much ! In cloisters cold and dim
Let laggards frown, but let the wise be gay !
I want my boy to laugh from day to day,
And smile at Fear, and torture not himself
With baleful thoughts. And yet, to bring him
pelf,
I die unblest, unprayed-for, in the flash
Of one wild moment ! If the deed be rash,
I do't in pity, not uncomfòrdèd ;
For God, they say, protects when one is dead

One's only child ! And thou ? Forgive me, Dear !
And love my boy,—when I'm no longer here. . . .
Aye, tell him, Roland ! tell him that I died
A natural death,—and blessed thee like a bride,
And called on God to guard thee evermore !”

A shuddering sob convulsed him to the core
At these last words. “My wife ! my winsome wife !
Mine and not mine ! My wife !” and then, at strife
With his own grief, he fell before the child,
And kissed and clasped him, and, in accents wild,
Called him his Angel, his predestined one,
And bore him out triumphant to the sun,
And stilled his cries by clamouring to the blast :
“Come back ! Come back !” and turned a face
aghast

To that old hag, who croaked upon the sands.

And what the sequel of the love-demands
Of that lorn letter ? Day by day, for weeks,
The wifeless man, with sad and sunken cheeks,
Sailed o'er the deep ; and sought, in silent bays,
And lonely creeks, the wooed and wished-for gaze
Of stranded Gladys ; but he gained thereby
Naught but despair, and shame that cannot die,—
Shame and despair and blistering of the soul
Burnt through by tears,—as though some burning coal
Had fallen therein ! He was the fool of Time
And,—like a man for whom in every chime
Outrings a knell,—he quaffed the wine of hope,
And found it poison. All his thoughts did grope
In undug graves ; and earthward and by sea,
No man was found on foot, or on his knee,

At home,—abroad,—in sanctum or in pit
Of lowliest labour, so untimely knit
To thoughts of dole. And still the large-eyed corse
Veered out to sea, as blind as his remorse,—
As deaf as danger, and as stiff and cold
As lopped-off limbs of trees upon the mould.
Yet she was hallowed by the nights and days
Of heavenward calm, and reddened by the rays
Of pitying suns, and looked at, after dark,
By Lady Dian in her crescent-bark.
Aye ! she was cradled, for a week and more,
On Ocean's breast, and then, amid the roar
Of waves up-shuddering to the star-lit skies,
Torn down in wrack, where Silence underlies
All hopes and fears and frailties of the sod,
This side the sanctum of the joys of God !



MISCELLANEOUS POEMS



ANTEROS.

I.

THIS is the feast-day of my soul and me,
 For I am half a god and half a man.
 These are the hours in which are heard by sea,
 By land and wave, and in the realms of space,
 The lute-like sounds which sanctify my span,
 And give me power to sway the human race.

II.

I am the king whom men call Lucifer,
 I am the genius of the nether spheres.
 Give me my Christian name, and I demur.
 Call me a Greek, and straightway I rejoice.
 Yea, I am Anteros, and with my tears
 I salt the earth which gladdens at my voice.

III.

I am old Anteros ; a young, old god ;
 A sage who smiles and limps upon a crutch.
 But I can turn my crutch into a rod,
 And change my rod into a crown of wood.
 Yea, I am he who conquers with a touch,
 And plays with poisons till he makes them good.

IV.

The sun, uprising with his golden hair,
Is mine apostle ; and he serves me well.
Thoughts and desires of mine, beyond compare,
Thrill at his touch. The moon, so lost in thought,
Has pined for love ; and wanderers out of hell,
And saints from heaven, have known what I have
taught.

V.

Great are my griefs ; my joys are multiplex ;
And beasts and birds and men my subjects are ;
Yea, all created things that have a sex,
And flies and flowers and monsters of the mere ;
All these, and more, proclaim me from afar,
And sing my marriage songs from year to year.

VI.

There are no bridals but the ones I make ;
For men are quickened when they turn to me.
The soul obeys me for its body's sake,
And each is formed for each, as day for night.
'Tis but the soul can pay the body's fee
To win the wisdom of a fool's delight.

VII.

Yea, this is so. My clerks have set it down,
And birds have blabbed it to the winds of heaven.
The flowers have guessed it, and, in bower and town,
Lovers have sung the songs that I have made.
Give me your lives, O mortals, and, for leaven,
Ye shall receive the fires that cannot fade.

VIII.

O men ! O maidens ! O ye listless ones !
 Ye who desert my temples in the East,
 Ye who reject the rays of summer suns,
 And cling to shadows in the wilderness ;
 Why are ye sad ? Why frown ye at the feast,
 Ye who have eyes to see and lips to press ?

IX.

Why, for a wisdom that ye will not prove,
 A joy that crushes and a love that stings,
 A freak, a frenzy in a fated groove,
 A thing of nothing born of less than nought—
 Why in your hearts do ye desire these things,
 Ye who abhor the joys that ye have sought ?

X.

See, see ! I weep, but I can jest at times ;
 Yea, I can dance and toss my tears away.
 The sighs I breathe are fragrant as the rhymes
 Of men and maids whose hearts are overthrown.
 I am the god for whom all maidens pray,
 But none shall have me for herself alone.

XI.

No ; I have love enough, here where I stand,
 To marry fifty maids in their degree ;
 Aye, fifty times five thousand in a band,
 And every bride the proxy of a score.
 Want ye a mate for millions ? I am he.
 Glory is mine, and glee-time evermore.

XII.

O men ! O masters ! O ye kings of grief !
Ye who control the world but not the grave,
What have ye done to make delight so brief,
Ye who have spurned the minstrel and the lyre ?
I will not say : " Be patient." Ye are brave ;
And ye shall guess the pangs of my desire.

XIII.

There shall be traitors in the court of love,
And tears and tortures and the bliss of pain.
The maids of men shall seek the gods above,
And drink the nectar of the golden lake.
Blessèd are they for whom the gods are fain ;
They shall be glad for love's and pity's sake.

XIV.

They shall be taught the songs the sirens know,
The wave's lament, the west wind's psalmistry,
The secrets of the south and of the snow,
The wherewithal of day, and death, and night.
O men ! O maidens ! pray no prayer for me,
But sing to me the songs of my delight.

XV.

Aye, sing to me the songs I love to hear,
And let the sound thereof ascend to heaven.
And let the singers, with a voice of cheer,
Announce my name to all the ends of earth ;
And let my servants, seventy times and seven,
Re-shout the raptures of my Samian mirth !

XVI.

Let joy prevail, and Frenzy, like a flame,
Seize all the souls of men for sake of me.
For I will have Contention put to shame,
And all the hearts of all things comfortèd.
There are no laws but mine on land and sea,
And men shall crown me when their kings are dead.

HYMN TO THE RISING SUN.

I.

O MIGHTY Orb that on the Morning's brow
Dost shine, all-seeing, in the plenitude
Of thine up-rising ! O thou joy of earth !
Look down and bless the day that's new-ordained,
And let the pæans of the pomp of spring
Be thine forever, O thou lordly One !

That hast the Orient for thy crowning-place
And all the welkin for thy way of grace.

II.

The sea is thine, the shores thereof are thine,
And all the haunts of men all through the zones ;
Yea, each created thing through all the years,
All things are thine to make thee paramount ;
And there's no essence known, by sea or land,
That is not quickened by the sight of thee ;
No ! there is nothing, earthward or in air,
Which loves thee not with love beyond compare.

III.

O first-born on the mountains ! O thou sun
That art a portent and a prodigy,

And evermore dost measure time and space !
We turn to thee to see thee as thou art—
How fair, how constant, and how girt with beams,
And how exultant in thine azure tent,
 When, one by one, the stars confess thy power,
 And leave thee all the landscapes for a dower.

IV.

Bless thou the hills, the rivers and the plains,
The founts, the forests, and the foaming sea ;
And each and all thy suppliants here below !
Through all the seasons of thy setting-time,
Bless thou the winds which are thy messengers ;
And in thy rising bless thou every field,
 And every harvest which thou shinest on,
 And every soul who claims thy benison.

V.

O planet prince ! O glory born of night
That out of night dost come to sway the world !
Behold we love thee as the Titans loved,
When thou didst bear a god's name under Heaven.
For thou'rt the Regent of the King of Kings,
And his exponent through the centuries ;
 And all thy ways are wondrous as of old
 When Sappho praised thee with her harp of gold.

VI.

A laureate bird is thine in every grove,
In all the fields thou hast thy troubadours.

A thousand times the lark has trilled to thee,
And waked the woods in April and in May ;
A myriad times and more his skyward notes
Have drenched the summer with the dews of song,
And made, as 'twere, a feast-time overhead
For bards to boast of when the days are dead.

VII.

Thou proud and pure ! Thou keeper of the keys
Of East and West which are thy heritage,
Where thou,—at soaring and at setting-time,—
Dost hold a mansion, well-beloved of men,
Whereof the roofs are jasper and red light.
O jocund king ! transcendent, un-afraid,
And unassailed by storms throughout the land,
Look down and bless the oceans thou hast spanned.

VIII.

Bless thou the workers and the men of thought,
The work they do, the wonders of the lute,
And all the whisperings of the woods and streams !
For thou'rt the wearer of the clouds of morn,
And where thou art the hours are golden-winged,
And where thy servants are thy fame is great,
And where thy singers are, in bower and town,
The hearts of men respond to thy renown.

IX.

Hear us, Light Giver ! and from dawn to dusk
Be thou the fiery signal of much joy !

Unfurl thy banners beauteous on the hills,
And let the flash thereof,—thy blazonry,—
Be Hope's fore-runner in the reddening meads.
O Sire of Seasons ! Monarch of the Months !
 Illume, uplift us, here upon the sod,
 And lead our lives from Nature up to God.

THE WAKING OF THE LARK.

I.

O BONNIE bird, that in the brake, exultant, dost prepare thee—

As poets do whose thoughts are true,—for wings that will upbear thee ;

Oh ! tell me, tell me, bonnie bird,

Canst thou not pipe of hope deferred ?

Or canst thou sing of naught but Spring among the golden meadows ?

II.

Methinks a bard (and thou art one) should suit his song to sorrow,

And tell of pain, as well as gain, that waits us on the morrow ;

But thou art not a prophet, thou,

If naught but joy can touch thee now ;

If, in thy heart, thou hast no vow that speaks of Nature's anguish.

III.

Oh ! I have held my sorrows dear, and felt, though poor and slighted,

The songs we love are those we hear when love is unrequited.

But thou art still the slave of dawn,
And canst not sing till night be gone,
Till o'er the pathway of the fawn the sunbeams shine
and quiver.

IV.

Thou art the minion of the sun that rises in his
splendour,
And canst not spare for Dian fair the songs that
should attend her.

The moon, so sad and silver-pale,
Is mistress of the nightingale ;
And thou wilt sing on hill and dale no ditties in the
darkness.

V.

For Queen and King thou wilt not spare one note of
thine outpouring ;
And thou'rt as free as breezes be on Nature's velvet
flooring.

The daisy, with its hood undone,
The grass, the sunlight, and the sun—
These are the joys, thou holy one ! that pay thee for
thy singing.

VI.

Oh, hush ! Oh, hush ! how wild a gush of rapture in
the distance,—

A roll of rhymes, a toll of chimes, a cry for love's
assistance ;

A sound that wells from happy throats,
A flood of song where beauty floats,
And where our thoughts, like golden boats, do seem
to cross a river.

VII.

This is the advent of the lark—the priest in grey
apparel—

Who doth prepare to trill in air his sinless Summer
carol ;

 This is the prelude to the lay

 The birds did sing in Cæsar's day,

And will again, for aye and aye, in praise of God's
creation.

VIII.

O dainty thing, on wonder's wing, by life and love
elated,

Oh ! sing aloud from cloud to cloud, till day be
consecrated ;

 Till from the gateways of the morn,

 The sun, with all his light unshorn,

His robes of darkness round him torn, doth scale the
lofty heavens !

A BALLAD OF KISSES.

I.

THERE are three kisses that I call to mind,
And I will sing their secrets as I go.
The first, a kiss too courteous to be kind,
Was such a kiss as monks and maidens know ;
As sharp as frost, as blameless as the snow.

II.

The second kiss, ah, God ! I feel it yet,
And evermore my soul will loathe the same.
The toys and joys of fate I may forget,
But not the touch of that divided shame :
It clove my lips ; it burnt me like a flame.

III.

The third, the final kiss, is one I use
Morning and noon and night ; and not amiss.
Sorrow be mine if such I do refuse !
And when I die, be love, enrapt in bliss,
Re-sanctified in Heaven by such a kiss.

MARY ARDEN.

I.

O THOU to whom athwart the perished days,
And parted nights long sped, we lift our gaze,
Behold ! I greet thee with a modern rhyme,
Love-lit and reverent as befits the time,
To solemnise the birth-day of thy son.

II.

And who was he who flourished in the smiles
Of thy fair face ? 'Twas Shakespeare of the Isles,
Shakespeare of England, whom the world has known
As thine, and ours, and Glory's, in the zone
Of all the seas and all the lands of earth.

III.

He was un-famous when he came to thee,
But sound, and sweet, and good for eyes to see,
And born at Stratford, on St. George's Day,
A week before the wondrous month of May ;
And God therein was gracious to us all.

IV.

He loved thee, Lady ! and he loved the world ;
And, like a flag, his fealty was unfurled ;

And Kings who flourished ere thy son was born
Shall live through him, from morn to furthest morn,
In all the far-off cycles yet to come.

V.

He gave us Falstaff, and a hundred quips,
A hundred mottoes from immortal lips ;
And, year by year, we smile to keep away
The generous tears that mind us of the sway
Of his great singing, and the pomp thereof.

VI.

His was the nectar of the gods of Greece,
The lute of Orpheus, and the Golden Fleece
Of grand endeavour ; aye ! the thunder-roll
Of words majestic, which from pole to pole
Have borne the tidings of our English tongue.

VII.

He gave us Hamlet ; and he taught us more
Than schools have taught us ; and his fairy-lore
Was fraught with science ; and he called from death
Verona's Lovers, with the burning breath
Of their great passion that has filled the spheres.

VIII.

He made us know Cordelia, and the man
Who murdered sleep, and baleful Caliban ;
And, one by one, athwart the gloom appeared
Maidens and men and myths who were revered
In halcyon days, before the earth was sad.

IX.

Aye ! this is true. It was ordainèd so ;
He was thine own, three hundred years ago ;
But ours to-day, and ours till earth be red
With doom-day splendour for the quick and dead
And days and nights be scattered like the leaves !

X.

It was for this he lived, for this he died :
To raise to Heaven the face that never lied,
To lean to earth the lips that should become
Fraught with conviction when the mouth was dumb,
And all the firm, fine body turned to clay.

XI.

He lived to seal, and sanctify, the lives
Of perished maids and uncreated wives,
And gave them each a space wherein to dwell ;
And for his mother's sake he loved them well,
And made them types, undying, of all truth.

XII.

O fair and fond young mother of the boy
Who wrought all this—O Mary !—in thy joy
Didst thou perceive, when, fitful from his rest,
He turned to thee, that his would be the best
Of all men's chanting since the world began ?

XIII.

Didst thou, O Mary ! with the eye of trust
Perceive, prophetic, through the dark and dust

Of things terrene, the glory of thy son,
And all the pride therein that should be won
By toilsome men, content to be his slaves?

XIV.

Didst thou, good mother ! in the tender ways
That women find to fill the fleeting days,
Behold afar the Giant who should rise
With feet on earth, and forehead in the skies,
To write his name, and thine, among the stars?

XV.

I love to think it ; and, in dreams at night
I see thee stand, erect, and all in white,
With hands out-yearning to that mighty form,
As if to draw him back from out the storm,—
A child again, and thine to nurse withal.

XVI.

I see thee, pale and pure, with flowing hair,
And big, bright eyes,—far-searching in the air
For thy sweet babe,—and, in a trice of time,
I see the boy advance to thee, and climb,
And call thee “ Mother ! ” in ecstatic tones.

XVII.

Yet, if my thought be vain—if, by a touch
Of this weak hand, I vex thee overmuch—
Forbear the blame, sweet Spirit ! and endow
My heart with fervour while to thee I bow
Athwart the threshold of my fading dream.

XVIII.

For,—though so seeming-bold in this my song,—
I turn to thee with reverence, in the throng
Of words and thoughts, as shepherds scanned, afar,
The famed effulgence of that eastern star

Which ushered in the Crowned One of the heavens.

XIX.

In dreams of rapture I have seen thee pass
Along the banks of Avon, by the grass,
As fair as that fair Juliet whom thy son
Endowed with life, but with the look of one

Who knows the nearest way to some new grave.

XX.

And often, too, I've seen thee in the flush
Of thy full beauty, while the mother's "Hush!"
Hung on thy lip, and all thy tangled hair
Re-clothed a bosom that in part was bare

Because a tiny hand had toyed therewith!

XXI.

Oh! by the June-tide splendour of thy face
When, eight weeks old, the child in thine embrace
Did leap and laugh,—O Mary! by the same,
I bow to thee, and magnify thy name,

And call thee England's Pride for evermore.

THE LADY OF THE MAY.

I.

O STARS that fade in amber skies
Because ye dread the light of day,
O moon so lonely and so wise,
Look down, and love my Love alway ;
Salute the Lady of the May !

II.

O lark that soarest in the light
To hail thy lord in his array,
Look down ; be just ; and sing aright
For one who claims thy song to-day
To greet his Lady of the May.

III.

“O lady ! lady !” sings the lark,
“Thy lover’s hest I do obey ;
For thou art splendid after dark,
And where thou smilest, there is day ;
And thou’rt the Lady of the May.

IV.

“The nightingale’s a friend of mine,
And yesternight she flew my way.
‘Awake,’ she cried, ‘at morning shine,
And sing for me thy blithest lay
To greet the Lady of the May.

V.

“And tell her, tell her, gentle one,
While thou attun'st thy morning lay,
That I will sing at set of sun
Another song for thy sweet fay,
Because she's Lady of the May.”

VI.

“And, lo, I come,” the lark in air,
Self-poised and free, did seem to say ;
“I come to greet thy lady's hair,
I come athwart the beams of day
To laud thy Lady of the May.”

VII.

Oh, thank thee, bird that singest well !
For all thou say'st and still wouldst say,—
And for the thoughts which Philomel
Intends to trill, in roundelay,
To greet my Lady of the May.

VIII.

We two (my Love and I) are one,
And so shall be, for aye and aye.
Go, take my homage to the sun,
And bid him shine his best to-day
To crown my Lady of the May !

ZULALIE.

I.

I AM the sprite
That reigns at night ;
My body is fair for man's delight !
I leap and laugh
As the wine I quaff,
And I am the queen of Astrofelle.

II.

I curse and swear
In my demon-lair ;
I shake wild sunbeams out of my hair.
I madden the old,
I gladden the bold,
And I am the queen of Astrofelle.

III.

Of churchyard stone
I have made my throne ;
My locks are looped with a dead man's bone.
Mine eyes are red
With the tears I shed,
And I am the queen of Astrofelle.

IV.

In cities and camps
I have lighted my lamps,
My kisses are caught by kings and tramps.
With rant and revel
My hair I dishevel,
And I am the queen of Astrofelle.

V.

My kisses are stains,
Mine arms are chains,
My forehead is fair and false like Cain's.
My gain is loss,
Mine honour is dross,—
And I am the queen of Astrofelle !

BEETHOVEN AT THE PIANO.

I.

SEE where Beethoven sits alone—a dream of days
 elysian,
A crownless king upon a throne, reflected in a vision—
The man who strikes the potent chords which make
 the world, in wonder,
Acknowledge him, though poor and dim, the mouth-
 piece of the thunder.

II.

He feels the music of the skies the while his heart is
 breaking ;
He sings the songs of Paradise, where love has no
 forsaking ;
And, though so deaf he cannot hear the tempest as a
 token,
He makes the music of his mind the grandest ever
 spoken.

III.

He doth not hear the whispered word of love in his
 seclusion,
Or voice of friend, or song of bird, in Nature's sad
 confusion ;

But he hath made, for Love's sweet sake, so wild a
 declamation,
That all true lovers of the earth have claimed him of
 their nation.

IV.

He had a Juliet in his youth, as Romeo had before him,
And, Romeo like, he sought to die that she might then
 adore him ;
But she was weak, as women are whose faith has not
 been proven,
And would not change her name for his—Guiciardi
 for Beethoven.

V.

O minstrel, whom a maiden spurned, but whom a
 world has treasured !
O sovereign of a grander realm than man has ever
 measured !
Thou hast not lost the lips of love, but thou hast
 gained, in glory,
The love of all who know the thrall of thine immortal
 story.

VI.

Thou art the bard whom none discard, but whom all
 men discover
To be a god, as Orpheus was, albeit a lonely lover ;
A king to call the stones to life beside the roaring
 ocean,
And bid the stars discourse to trees in words of man's
 emotion.

VII.

A king of joys, a prince of tears, an emperor of the
seasons,
Whose songs are like the sway of years in Love's
immortal reasons ;
A bard who knows no life but this : to love and be
rejected,
And reproduce in earthly strains the prayers of the
elected.

VIII.

O poet heart ! O seraph soul ! by men and maids
adorèd !
O Titan with the lion's mane, and with the splendid
forehead !
We men who bow to thee in grief must tremble in our
gladness,
To know what tears were turned to pearls to crown
thee in thy sadness.

IX.

An Angel by direct descent, a German by alliance,
Thou didst intone the wonder-chords which made
Despair a science.
Yea, thou didst strike so grand a note that, in its large
vibration,
It seemed the roaring of the sea in nature's jubila-
tion.

X.

O Sire of Song ! Sonata-King ! Sublime and loving
 master ;
The sweetest soul that ever struck an octave in disaster ;
In thee were found the fires of thought—the splendours
 of endeavour,—
And thou shalt sway the minds of men for ever and
 for ever !

A PRAYER FOR LIGHT.

I.

OH, give me light, to-day, or let me die,—
The light of love, the love-light of the sky,—
That I, at length, may see my darling's face
One minute's space.

II.

Have I not wept to know myself so weak
That I can feel, not see, the dimpled cheek,
The lips, the eyes, the sunbeams that enfold
Her locks of gold?

III.

Have I not sworn that I will not be wed,
But mate my soul with hers on my death-bed?
The soul can see,—for souls are seraphim,—
When eyes are dim!

IV.

Oh, hush! she comes. I know her. She is nigh
She brings me death, true heart, and I will die.
She brings me love, for love and life are one
Beyond the sun.

V.

This is the measure, this, of all my joys :
Life is a curse and Death's a counterpoise.
Give me thy hand, O sweet one, let me know
Which path I go.

VI.

I cannot die if thou be not a-near,
To lead me on to Life's appointed sphere.
O spirit-face, O angel, with thy breath
Kiss me to death !

M I R A G E.

I.

'Tis a legend of a lover,
 'Tis a ballad to be sung,
 In the gloaming,—under cover,—
 By a minstrel who is young ;
 By a singer who has passion, and who sways us with
 his tongue.

II.

I, who know it, think upon it,
 Not unhappy, though in tears,
 And I gather in a sonnet
 All the glory of the years ;
 And I kiss and clasp a shadow when the substance
 disappears.

III.

Ah ! I see her as she faced me,
 In the sinless summer days,
 When her little hands embraced me,
 And I saddened at her gaze,
 Thinking, Sweet One ! will she love me when we walk
 in other ways ?

IV.

Will she cling to me as kindly
When the childish faith is lost?
Will she pray for me as blindly,
Or but weigh the wish and cost,
Looking back on our lost Eden from the girlhood she
has crossed?

V.

Oh! I swear by all I honour,
By the graves that I endow,
By the grace I set upon her,
That I meant the early vow,—
Meant it much as men and women mean the same
thing spoken now.

VI.

But her maiden troth is broken,
And her mind is ill at ease,
And she sends me back no token
From her home beyond the seas;
And I know, though nought is spoken, that she thanks
me on her knees.

VII.

Yes, for pardon freely granted;
For she wronged me, understand.
And my life is disenchanted
As I wander through the land,
With the sorrows of dark morrows that await me in a
band.

VIII.

Hers was sweetest of sweet faces,
Hers the tenderest eyes of all !
In her hair she had the traces
Of a heavenly coronal,
Bringing sunshine to sad places where the sunlight
could not fall.

IX.

She was fairer than a vision ;
Like a vision, too, has flown.
I who flushed at her decision,
Lo ! I languish here alone ;
And I tremble when I tell you that my anger was mine
own.

X.

Not for her, sweet sainted creature !
Could I curse her to her face ?
Could I look on form and feature,
And deny the inner grace ?
Like a little wax Madonna she was holy in the place.

XI.

And I told her, in mad fashion,
That I loved her,—would incline
All my life to this one passion,
And would kneel as at a shrine ;
And would love her late and early, and would teach
her to be mine.

XII.

Now in dreams alone I meet her
With my lowly human praise :
She is sweeter and completer,
And she smiles on me always ;
But I dare not rise and greet her as I did in early
days.

A SONG OF SERVITUDE.

I.

THIS is a song of serfs that I have made,
 A song of sympathy for grief and joy :—
 The old, the young, the loved and the betrayed,
 All, all must serve, for all must be obeyed.

II.

There are no tyrants but the serving ones,
 There are no servants but the men who rule.
 The Captain conquers with his army's guns,
 But he himself is conquered by his sons.

III.

What is a parent but a daughter's slave,
 A son's defender when the lad is ill ?
 The great Creator loves the good and brave,
 And makes a flower the spokesman of a grave.

IX.

The son is servant in his father's halls,
 The daughter is her mother's maid-o'-work.
 The welkin wonders when the ocean calls,
 And earth accepts the raindrop when it falls.

V.

There are no "ups" in life, there are no "downs,"
For "high" and "low" are words of like degree ;
He who is light of heart when Fortune frowns,
He is a king though nameless in the towns.

VI.

None is so lofty as the sage who prays,
None so unhigh as he who will not kneel.
The breeze is servant to the summer days,
And he is bowed-to most who most obeys.

VII.

These are the maxims that I take to heart,
Do thou accept them, reader, for thine own ;
Love well thy work ; be truthful in the mart,
And foes will praise thee when thy friends depart.

VIII.

None shall upbraid thee then for thine estate,
Or show thee meaner than thou art in truth.
Make friends with death ; and God who is so great,
He will assist thee to a nobler fate.

IX.

None are unfit to serve upon their knees
The saints of prayer, unseen but quick to hear.
The flowers are servants to the pilgrim bees,
And wintry winds are tyrants of the trees.

X.

All things are good ; all things incur a debt,
And all must pay the same, or soon or late.
The sun will rise betimes, but he must set ;
And Man must seek the laws he would forget.

XI.

There are no mockeries in the universe,
No false accounts, no errors that will thrive.
The work we do, the good things we rehearse,
Are boons of Nature basely named a curse.

XII.

"Give us our daily bread !" the children pray,
And mothers plead for them while thus they speak.
But "Give us work, O God !" we men should say,
That we may gain our bread from day to day.

XIII.

'Tis not alone the crown that makes the king ;
'Tis service done, 'tis duty to his kind.
The lark who soars so high is quick to sing,
And proud to yield allegiance to the spring.

XIV.

And we who serve ourselves, whate'er befall,
Athwart the dangers of the day's behests ;
Oh, let's not shirk, at joy or sorrow's call,
The service due to God who serves us all !

SYLVIA IN THE WEST.

I.

WHAT shall be done? I dare not pray ;
Nor shall I stint the pangs I feel.
If prayers could alter night to day,—
Or black to white,—I might appeal ;
I might attempt to sway thy heart,
And prove it mine,—or claim a part.

II.

I might attempt to urge on thee
At least the chance of some redress,—
An hour's revoke,—a moment's plea,—
A smile to make my sorrows less.
I might perchance be taught,—in time,—
To blush for hope, as for a crime !

III.

But thou art stone, though soft and fleet,—
A statue, not a maiden, thou !
A man may hear thy bosom beat
When thou hast sworn an idle vow.
But not for love, no ! not for this ;
For thou wilt sell thy bridal kiss.

IV.

I mean, thy friends will sell thy love,
As loves are sold in England, here.
A man will buy my golden dove,—
I doubt he'll find his bargain dear !
He'll lose the wine ; he'll buy the bowl,
The life, the limbs, but not the soul.

V.

So, take thy mate and all his wealth,
And all the joys that wait on fame.
Thou'lt weep,—poor martyred one !—by stealth.
And think of me, and shriek my name ;
Yes, in his arms ! And wake, too late,
To coax and kiss the man you hate.

VI.

By slow degrees, from year to year,
From week to week, from night to night,
He will be taught how dark and drear
Is bartered love,—how sad to sight
A perjured face ! And he'll be driven
To compass Hell,—and dream of Heaven !

VII.

But stand at God's high altar there,
With saints around thee tall and sweet,
I'll match thy pride with my despair,
And drag thee down from glory's seat.
Yea, thou shalt kneel ! Thy head shall bow
As mine is bent in anguish now.

VIII.

What ! for thy sake have I forsworn
My just ambition,—all my joy,
And all my hope from morn to morn,
That seemed a prize without alloy?
Have I done this? I have ; and see !
I weep wild tears for thine and thee.

IX.

But I can school my soul to strength,
And weep and wail as children do ;
Be hard as stone, yet melt at length,
And curb my pride as thou canst, too !
But I have faith, and thou hast none ;
And I have joy, but thine is done.

X.

No marriage-bells? No songs, you say?
No flowers to grace our bridal morn?
No wine? No kiss? No wedding-day?
I care not ! Oaths are all forsworn ;
And, when I clasped thy hand so white,
I meant to curse thee, girl, to-night.

XI.

And so I shall,—oh ! doubt not that.
At stroke of twelve I'll curse thee twice.
When screams the owl, when swoops the bat,
When ghosts are out I'll curse thee thrice.
And thou shalt hear !—Aye, by my troth,
One song will suit the souls of both.

XII.

I curse thy face ; I curse thy hair ;
I curse thy lips that smile so well,
Thy life, thy love, and my despair,
My loveless couch, thy wedding-bell ;
My soul and thine !—Ah, see ! though black,
I take one half my curses back.

XIII.

For thou and I were formed for hate,
For love, for scorn ; no matter what.
I am thy Fere and thou my Fate,
And fire and flood shall harm us not.
Thou shalt be killed and hid from ken,
And fiends will sing thy requiem then.

XIV.

Yet think not Death will serve thy stead ;
I'll find thy grave, though walled in stone.
I'll move thy mould to make my bed,
And lie with thee long hours alone :—
Long, lifeless hours ! Ah, God, how free,
How pale, how cold, thy lips will be !

XV.

But graves are cells of truth and love,
And men may talk no treason there.
A corpse will wear no wedding-glove,
A ghost will make no sign in air.

But ghosts can pray? Well! let them kneel;
 They, too, must loathe the love they feel.

.

XVI.

Ah me! to sleep and yet to wake,
 To live so long, and yet to die;
 To sing sad songs for Sylvia's sake,
 And yet no peace to gain thereby!
 What have I done? What left unsaid?
 Nay, I will count my tears instead.

XVII.

Here is a word of wild design.
 Here is a threat; 'twas meant to warn.
 Here is a fierce and freezing line,
 As hot as hate, as cold as scorn.
 Ah, friend! forgive,—forbear my rhymes,
 But pray for me, sweet soul! sometimes.

XVIII.

Had I a curse to spare to-day,
 (Which I have not) I'd use it now.
 I'd curse my hair, to turn it grey;
 I'd teach my back to bend and bow;
 I'd make myself so old and thin
 That I should seem too sad to sin.

XIX.

And then we'd meet, we two, at night ;
And I should know what saints have known.
Thou wouldst not tremble, dear, for fright,
Or shriek to meet me there alone.
I should not then be spurned for this,
Or want a smile, or need a kiss.

XX.

I should not then be fierce as fire,
Or mad as sin, or sharp as knife ;
My heart would throb with no desire,
For care would cool the flush of life ;
And I should love thee, spotless one,
As pilgrims love some holy nun.

XXI.

Ah, queen-like creature ! smile on me ;
Be kind, be good ; I loved thee much.
I thank thee, see ! on bended knee ;
I seek salvation in thy touch.
And when I sleep I watch thee come,
And both are wild, and one is dumb.

XXII.

I draw thee, ghost-like, to my heart ;
I kiss thy lips and call thee mine.
Of thy sweet soul I form a part,
And my poor soul is part of thine.
Ah, kill me, kiss me, curse me, Thou !
But let me be thy servant now.

XXIII.

What ! did I curse thy golden hair ?
Well, then, the sun will set at noon ;
The face that keeps the world so fair
Is thine, not his ; he darkens soon.
Thy smile awakes the bird of dawn,
And day departs when thou art gone.

XXIV.

Oh ! had I groves in some sweet star
That shines in Heaven the whole night through,—
A steed with wings,—a golden car,—
A something wild and strange and true :—
A fairy's wand,—an angel's crown,—
I'd merge them all in thy renown.

XXV.

I'd give thee queens to wait on thee,
And kings to kneel to thee in prayer,
And seraph-boys,—by land and sea,—
To do thy bidding,—earth and air
To pay thee homage,—all the flowers,—
And all the nymphs in all the bowers.

XXVI.

And this our love should last for aye,
And we should live these thousand years.
We'd meet in Mars on Christmas Day,
And make the tour of all the spheres.
We'd do strange things ! Sweet stars would shine,
And Death would spare my love and thine.

XXVII.

But these are dreams ; and dreams are vain ;
 Mine most of all,—so heed them not.
Brave thoughts will die, though men complain,
 And mine was bold ! 'Tis now forgot.
Well ; let me bless thee, ere I sleep,
And give thee all my joys to keep.

XXVIII.

I bless the house where thou wast born,
 And every bower that's thine of right,
And every hour from flush of morn
 To death of day,—for thy delight.
I bless the sunbeams as they shine,
So like those golden locks of thine !

XXIX.

I bless thy lips, thy lustrous eyes,
 Thy face, thy feet, thy forehead fair,
The light that shines in summer skies,—
 In garden walks when thou art there,—
And all the grass beneath thy feet,
And all the songs thou singest, Sweet !

XXX.

But blessing thus,—ah, woe's the day !—
 I know what tears I shall not shed,
What flowers will bloom, and, bright as they,
 What bells will ring when I am dead.
Ah, kill me, kiss me, curse me, Thou !
But let me be thy minstrel now.

ELIANORE.

I.

THE forest flowers are faded all,
The winds complain, the snow-flakes fall,
 Elianore !
I turn to thee, as to a bower :—
Thou breathest beauty like a flower,
Thou smilest like a happy hour,
 Elianore !

II.

I turn to thee. I bless afar
Thy name, which is my guiding-star,
 Elianore !
And yet, ah God ! when thou art here
I faint, I hold my breath for fear.
Art thou some phantom wandering near,
 Elianore ?

III.

Oh, take me to thy bosom fair ;
Oh, cover me with thy golden hair,
 Elianore !
There let me lie when I am dead
Those morning-beams about me spread,
The glory of thy face o'erhead,
 Elianore !

THE STATUE.

I.

SEE where my lady stands,
Lifting her lustrous hands,—
Here let me bow.
Image of truth and grace !
Maid with the angel-face !
Earth was no dwelling-place
For such as thou.

II.

Ah, thou unhappy stone,
Make now thy sorrows known ;
Make known thy longing.
Thou art the form of one
Whom I, with hopes undone,
Buried at set of sun,—
All the friends thronging.

III.

Thou art a Vision bright
Lost out of Heaven at night,
Far from thy race.
Oft when the others dance,
Come I, with wistful glance,
Fearful lest thou, perchance,
Leave the dark place.

IV.

No ! thou wilt never flee,
Earth has a charm for thee ;—
 Why should we sever ?
Years have I seen thee so,
Making pretence to go,
Lifting thine arms of snow,—
 Voiceless for ever !

V.

Here bring I all my cares,
Here dream and say my prayers
 While the bells toll.
O thou belovèd saint !
Let not my courage faint,
Let not a shame, or taint,
 Injure my soul !

PABLO DE SARASATE.

I.

WHO comes, to-day, with sunlight on his face,
And eyes of fire, that have a sorrow's trace,
But are not sad with sadness of the years,
Or hints of tears?

II.

He is a king, or I mistake the sign,
A king of song,—a comrade of the Nine,—
The Muses' brother, and their youngest one,
This side the sun.

III.

See how he bends to greet his soul's desire,
His violin, which trembles like a lyre,
And seems to trust him, and to know his touch,
Beloved so much!

IV.

He stands full height ; he draws it to his breast,
Like one, in joy, who takes a wonder-guest,—
A weird, wild thing, bewitched from end to end,—
To be his friend.

V.

And who can doubt the right it has to lie
So near his heart, and there to sob and sigh,
And there to shake its octaves into notes
With bird-like throats?

VI.

Ah ! see how deftly, with his lifted bow,
He strikes the chords of ecstasy and woe,
And wakes the wailing of the sprite within
That knows not sin.

VII.

A thousand heads are turned to where he stands,
A thousand hopes are moulded to his hands,
And, like a storm-wind hurrying from the north,
A shout breaks forth !

VIII.

It is the welcome that of old was given
To Paganini ere he joined in Heaven
The angel-choirs of those who serve aright
The God of Light.

IX.

It is the large, loud utterance of a throng
That loves a faith-employed, impassioned song ;
A song that soothes the heart, and makes it sad,—
Yet keeps us glad.

X.

For look ! how bearded men and women fair
Shed tears and smile, and half repeat a prayer,
And half are shamed in their so mean estate,
And he so great !

XI.

This is the young Endymion out of Spain
Who, laurel-crowned, has come to us again,
To re-intone the songs of other times
In far-off climes ;

XII.

To prove again that Music, by the plea
Of all men's love, has linked from sea to sea
All shores of earth in one serene and grand
Symphonic land.

XIII.

Oh ! hush the while ! Oh ! hush ! A bird has sung,
A Mayday bird has trilled without a tongue,
And now, 'twould seem, has wandered out of sight
For sheer delight.

XIV.

A phantom bird ! 'Tis gone where all things go—
The wind, the rain, the sunshine, and the snow,
The hopes we nursed, the dead things lately passed—
All dreams at last.

XV.

The towers of light, the castles in the air,
The queenly things with diamonds in their hair,
The toys of sound, the flowers of magic art—
All these depart.

XVI.

They seemed to live ; and lo ! beyond recall,
They take the sweet sad Silence for a pall,
And, wrapt therein, consent to be dismissed,
 Though glory-kissed.

XVII.

O pride of Spain ! O wizard with a wand
More fraught with fervours of the life beyond
Than books have taught us in these tawdry days,
 Take thou my praise.

XVIII.

Aye, take it, Pablo ! Though so poor a thing,
'Twill serve to mind thee of an English spring
When wealth, and worth, and fashion, each and all,
 Obeyed thy thrall.

XIX.

The lark that sings its love-song in the cloud
Is God-inspired and glad,—but is not proud,—
And soon forgets the salvos of the breeze,
 As thou dost these.

XX.

The shouts, the praises, and the swift acclaim,
That men have brought to magnify thy name,
Affect thee barely as an idle cheer
 Affects a seer.

XXI.

But thou art ours, O Pablo ! ours to-day,
Ours, and not ours, in thy triumphant sway ;
And we must urge it by the right that brings
Honour to kings.

XXII.

Honour to thee, thou stately, thou divine
And far-famed minstrel of a mighty line !
Honour to thee, and peace, and musings high,
Good-night ! Good-bye !

PRO PATRIA.

AN ODE TO SWINBURNE.

["We have not, alack ! an ally to befriend us,
And the season is ripe to extirpate and end us.
Let the German touch hands with the Gaul,
And the fortress of England must fall.

.

Louder and louder the noise of defiance
Rings rage from the grave of a trustless alliance,
And bids us beware, and be warned,
As abhorred of all nations and scorned."

— *A Word for the Nation, by A. C. Swinburne.*]

I.

NAY, good Sir Poet, read thy rhymes again,
And curb the tumults that are born in thee,
That now thy hand, relentful, may refrain
To deal the blow that Abel had of Cain.

II.

Are we not Britons born, when all is said,
And thou the offspring of the knightly souls
Who fought for Charles when fears were harvestèd,
And Cromwell rose to power on Charles's head ?

III.

O reckless, roystering bard, that in a breath
Hast found the way to flout thy fathers' flag,
Is't well, unheeding what thy Reason saith,
To seem to triumph in thy country's death ?

IV.

If none will plead for us, if none will say
How much thy Muse has wronged us in its thought,
Tis I will do it ; I will say thee nay,
And hurl thee back the ravings of thy lay !

V.

We own thy prowess ; for we've learnt by rote
Song after song of thine ; and thou art great.
But why this malice ? Why this wanton note
Which seems to rush like lava from thy throat ?

VI.

When Hugo spoke we owned his master-spell,
We knew he feared us more than he contemned.
He flecked with fire each sentence as it fell,
And tolled his rancours like a wedding-bell.

VII.

And we were proud of him, as France was proud ;
Aye ! called him brother, though he loved us not.
And all were thrilled when,—ruthless from a cloud,—
The bolt of death outstretched him for a shroud.

VIII.

Thou'rt great as he by fame and force of song,
But less than he as spokesman of his Land.
For thou hast railed at thine, to do it wrong,
And called us coward though our faith is strong.

IX.

England a coward? O thou five foot five
Of flesh and blood and sinew and the rest !
Is she not girt with glory and alive
To hear thee buzz thy scorn of all the hive ?

X.

Thou art a bee,—a bright, a golden thing
With too much honey ; and the taste thereof
Is sometimes rough, and somewhat of a sting
Dwells in the music that we hear thee sing.

XI.

Oh, thou hast wronged us ; thou hast said of late
More than is good for listeners to repeat.
Nay, I have marvelled at thy words of hate,
For friends and foes alike have deemed us great.

XII.

We are not vile ! We, too, have hearts to feel ;
And not in vain have men remembered this.
Our hands are quick at times to clasp the steel,
And strike the blows that centuries cannot heal.

XIII.

The sea-ward rocks are proud to be assailed
By wave and wind ; for bluster kills itself,
But rocks endure. And England has prevailed
Times out of number, when her foes have failed.

XIV.

And once, thou know'st, a giant here was found,
Not bred in France, or elsewhere under sun.
And he was Shakespeare of the whole world round,
And he was king of men, though never crowned.

XV.

He loved the gracious earth from east to west,
And all the seas thereof and all its shores.
But most he loved the homestead he possessed,
And, right or wrong, his country seemed the best.

XVI.

He was content with Albion's classic land.
He loved its flag ; he veiled its every fault.
Yes ! he was proud to let its honour stand,
And bring to light the wonders it had planned.

XVII.

Do thou thus much ; and deal no further pain ;
But sooner tear the tongue from out thy mouth
And sooner let the life in thee be slain,
Than strike at One who strikes thee not again.

XVIII.

Thy land and mine, our England, is erect,
And like a lordly thing she looks on thee,
And sees thee numbered with her bards elect,
And will not harm the brow that she has decked.

XIX.

She lets thee live. She knows how rich and rare
Are songs like thine, and how the smallest bird
May make much music in the summer air,
And how a curse may turn into a prayer.

XX.

Take back thy taunt, I say ; and with the same
Accept our pardon ; or,—if this offend,—
Why then no pardon, e'en in England's name.
We have our country still, and thou thy fame !

THE LITTLE GRAVE.

I.

A LITTLE mound of earth
Is all the land I own :
Death gave it me,—five feet by three,
And marked it with a stone.

II.

My home, my garden-grave,
Where most I long to go !
The ground is mine by right divine,
And Heaven will have it so.

III.

For here my darling sleeps,
Unseen,—arrayed in white,—
And o'er the grass the breezes pass,
And stars look down at night.

IV.

Here Beauty, Love, and Joy,
With Her in silence dwell,
As Eastern slaves are thrown in graves
Of kings remembered well.

V.

But here let no man come,
My mourning rights to sever.
Who lieth here is cold and dumb,
Her dust is mine for ever !

A DIRGE.

I.

ART thou lonely in thy tomb?
Art thou cold in such a gloom?
Rouse thee, then, and make me room,
Miserere Domine !

II.

Phantoms vex thy virgin sleep,
Nameless things around thee creep,
Yet be patient, do not weep,—
Miserere Domine !

III.

O be faithful ! O be brave !
Nought shall harm thee in thy grave ;
Let the restless spirits rave,
Miserere Domine !

IV.

When my pilgrimage is done,
When the grace of God is won,
I will come to thee, my nun,—
Miserere Domine !

V.

Like a priest in flowing vest,
Like a pale, unbidden guest,
I will come to thee and rest,—
Miserere Domine !

DAISIES OUT AT SEA.

I.

THESE are the buds we bear beyond the surf,—
 Enshrined in mould and turf,—
 To take to fields far off, a land's salute
 Of high and vast repute,—
 The Shakespeare-land of every heart's desire,
 Whereof, 'tis said, the fame shall not expire,
 But shine in all men's thoughts as shines a beacon-fire.

II.

O bright and gracious things that seem to glow
 With frills of winter snow,
 And little golden heads that know the sun,
 And seasons half begun,
 How blithe they look, how fresh and debonair,
 In this their prison on the seaward air,
 On which no lark has soared to improvise a prayer.

III.

Have they no memory of the inland grass,—
 The fields where breezes pass,
 And where the full-eyed children, out at play,
 Make all the land so gay?
 Have they no thought of dews that, like a tear,
 Were shed by Morning on the Night's cold bier,
 In far-off English homes, beloved by all men here?

IV.

O gems of earth ! O trinkets of the spring !
 The sun, your gentle king,
Who counts your leaves and marshals ye apace,
 In many a sacred place,
The godlike summer sun will miss ye all,
For he has fostered all things, great and small,
Yea, all good things that live on earth's revolving ball.

V.

But when, on deck, he sees with eye serene
 The kirtles, tender-green,
And fair fresh faces of his hardy flowers,
 How will he throb for hours,
And wish the lark, the laureate of the light,
Were near at hand, to see so fair a sight,
And chant the joys thereof in words we cannot write.

VI.

Oh, I have loved ye more than may be told,
 And deemed it fairy-gold,—
And fairy-silver,—that ye bear withal ;
 Ye are so soft and small,
I weep for joy to find ye here to-day
So near to Heaven, and yet so far away,
In our good ocean-ship, whose bows are wet with
 spray.

VII.

Ye are the cynosure of many eyes
 Bright-blue as English skies,—
The sailor's eyes that scan ye in a row,
 As if intent to show

That this dear freight of mould and meadow-flower
Which sails the seas, in sunshine and in shower,
Is England's gift of love, which storms shall not
devour.

VIII.

She sends ye forth in sadness and in joy,
As one may send a toy
To children's children, bred in other lands
By love-abiding hands.
And, day by day, ye sail upon the foam
To call to mind the sires' and mothers' home,
Where babes, now grown to men, were wont of yore
to roam.

IX.

In England's name, in Shakespeare's,—and in ours,
Who bear these trusted flowers,—
There shall be heard a cheer from many throats,
A rush and roar of notes,
As loud, and proud, as those of heavenward birds ;
And they who till the ground and tend the herds
Will read our thoughts therein, and clothe the same in
words.

X.

For England's sake, for England once again,
In pride and power and pain,
For England, aye ! for England in the girth
Of all her joy and worth,
A strong and clear, outspoken, undefined,
And uncontrolled wild shout upon the wind,
Will greet these winsome flowers as friends of human-
kind !



SONNETS.

I.

ECSTASY.

I CANNOT sing to thee as I would sing
If I were quickened like the holy lark
With fire from Heaven and sunlight on his wing,
Who wakes the world with witcheries of the dark
Renewed in rapture in the reddening air.
A thing of splendour do I deem him then,
A feathered frenzy with an angel's throat,
A something sweet that somewhere seems to float
'Twixt earth and sky, to be a sign to men.
He fills me with such wonder and despair !
I long to kiss thy locks, so golden bright,
As he doth kiss the tresses of the sun.
Oh ! bid me sing to thee, my chosen one,
And do thou teach me, Love, to sing aright !

II.

VISIONS.

THE Poet meets Apollo on the hill,
And Pan and Flora and the Paphian Queen,
And infant naiads bathing in the rill,
And dryad maids that dance upon the green,
And fauns and Oreads in the silver sheen
They wear in summer, when the winds are still.
He quaffs the wine of life, and quaffs his fill,
And sees Creation through its mask terrene.
The dead are wise, for they alone can see
As see the bards,—as see, beyond the dust,
The eyes of babes. The dead alone are just.
There is no comfort in the bitter fee
That scholars pay for fame. True sage is he
Who doubts all doubt, and takes the soul on trust.

THE DAISY.

III.

SEE where it stands, the world-appointed flower,
Pure gold at centre, like the sun at noon,—
A mimic sun to light a true-love bower
For fair Queen Mab, now dead or in a swoon,
Whom late a poet saw beneath the moon.
It lifts its dainty face till sunset hour,
As if endowed with nympholeptic power,—
Then shuts its petals like a folding tune !
I love it more than words of mine can say,
And more than anchorite may breathe in prayer.
Methinks the lark has made it still his care
To brag of daisies to the lord of day.
Well ! I will follow suit, as best I may,
Launching my love-songs on the summer air.

IV.

PROBATION.

COULD I, O Love ! obtain a charter clear
To be thy bard, in all thy nights and days,
I would consult the stars, from year to year,
And talk with trees, and learn of them their ways,
And why the nymphs so seldom now appear
In human form, with rapt and earnest gaze ;
And I would learn of thee why Joy decays,
And why the Fauns have ceased to flourish here.
I would, in answer to the wind's "Alas !"
Explain the causes of a sorrow's flight ;
I would peruse the writing on the grass
Which flowers have traced in blue and red and
white ;
And, reading these, I would, as from a pen,
Read thoughts of thine unguessed by other men !

V.

DANTE.

HE lived and loved ; he suffered ; he was poor ;
But he was gifted with the gifts of Heaven,
And those of all the week-days that are seven,
And those of all the centuries that endure.
He bowed to none ; he kept his honour sure.
He followed in the wake of those Eleven
Who walked with Christ, and lifted up his steven*
To keep the bulwarks of his faith secure.
He knew the secrets of the singing-time ;
He tracked the sun ; he ate the luscious fruit
Of grief and joy ; and with his wonder-lute
He made himself a name in every clime.
The minds of men were madly stricken mute,
And all the world lay subject to his rhyme !

* Steven, a voice ; old word revived.

VI.

DIFFIDENCE.

I CANNOT deck my thought in proud attire,
Or make it fit for thee in any dress,
Or sing to thee the songs of thy desire,
In summer's heat, or by the winter's fire,
Or give thee cause to comfort or to bless.
For I have scanned mine own unworthiness,
And well I know the weakness of the lyre
Which I have striven to sway to thy caress.
Yet must I quell my tears and calm the smart
Of my vext soul, and steadfastly emerge
From lonesome thoughts, as from the tempest's
surge.
I must control the beating of my heart,
And bid false pride be gone, who, with his art,
Has pressed, too long, a suit I dare not urge.

VII.

FAIRIES.

GLORY endures when calumny hath fled ;
And fairies show themselves, in friendly guise,
To all who hold a trust beyond the dead,
And all who pray, albeit so worldly-wise,
With cheerful hearts, or wildly-weeping eyes.
They come and go when children are in bed
To gladden them with dreams from out the skies,
And sanctify all tears that they have shed !
Fairies are winged for wandering to and fro.
They live in legends. They survive the Greeks.
Wisdom is theirs ; they live for us and grow,
Like things ambrosial, fairer than the freaks
Of signs and seasons, which the Fates bestow,
Or fires of sunset on the mountain-peaks.

VIII.

SPIRIT LOVE.

How great my joy ! How grand my recompense !

 I bow ; I praise ; I keep thee in my sight.

I call thee mine, in love, though not in sense

To share with thee the heritage immense

 Of holy dreams which come to us at night.

For, through the medium of the spirit-lens,

 We see the soul, in its primeval light,

 And Reason spares the hopes it cannot blight.

It is the soul of thee, and not the form

 And not the face, I yearn-to in my sleep.

It is thyself. The body is the storm,

 The soul the star beyond it in the deep

 Of Nature's calm. And yonder on the steep

The Sun of Faith, quiescent, round, and warm !

IX.

AFTER TWO DAYS.

ANOTHER night has turned itself to day,
Another day has melted into eve,
And lo ! again I tread the measured way
Of word and thought, the twain to interweave,
As flowers absorb the rays that they receive.
And, all along the woodland where I stray,
I think of thee, and of the Ides of May,
And sorrow soothes the soul it would bereave.
Nor will I fear that thou, so far apart,
So dear to me, so fair, and so benign,
Wilt un-desire the fealty of a heart
Which evermore is pledged to thee and thine,
And turns to thee, in regions where thou art,
To hymn the raptures of thy face divine !

X.

BYRON.

HE was a god descended from the skies
To fight the fight of Freedom o'er a grave,
And consecrate a hope he could not save ;
For he was weak withal, and foolish wise.
Dark were his thoughts, and strange his destinies,
And oftentimes his life he did deprave.
But all do pity him, though none despise.

He was a prince of song, though sorrow's slave.
He asked for tears,—and they were tinged with fire ;
He asked for love, and love was sold to him.

He looked for solace at the goblet's brim,
And found it not ; then wept upon his lyre.
He sang the songs of all the world's desire,—
He wears the wreath no rivalry can dim !

XI.

LOVE'S AMBITION.

I MUST invoke thee for my spirit's good,
And prove myself un-guilty of the crime
Of mere self-seeking, though with this imbued.
I sing as sings the mavis in a wood,
Content to be alive at harvest-time.
Had I its wings I should not be withstood !
But I will weave my fancies into rhyme,
And greet afar the heights I cannot climb.
I will invoke thee, Love ! though far away,
And pay thee homage, as becomes a knight
Who longs to keep his true-love in his sight.
Yea, I will soar to thee, in roundelay,
In shine and shower, and make a bold assay
Of each fond hope, to compass thee aright.

XII.

LOVE'S DEFEAT.

Do what I will I cannot chant so well
As other men ; and yet my soul is true.
My hopes are bold ; my thoughts are hard to tell,
But thou canst read them, and accept them, too,
Though, half-abashed, they seem to hide from
view.
I strike the lyre, I sound the hollow shell ;
And why ? For comfort, when my thoughts rebel,
And when I count the woes that must ensue.
But for this reason, and no other one,
I dare to look thy way, and bow my head
To thy sweet name, as sunflower to the sun,
Though, peradventure, not so wisely fed
With garden fancies. Tears must now be shed,
Unnumbered tears, till life or love be done !

XIII.

A THUNDERSTORM AT NIGHT.

THE lightning is the shorthand of the storm
That tells of chaos ; and I read the same
As one may read the writing of a name,—
As one in Hell may see the sudden form
Of God's fore-finger pointed as in blame.
How weird the scene ! The Dark is sulphur-warm
With hints of death ; and in their vault enorme
The reeling stars coagulate in flame.
And now the torrents from their mountain-beds
Roar 'down unchecked ; and serpents shaped of
mist
Writhe up to Heaven with unforbidden heads ;
And thunder-clouds, whose lightnings intertwist,
Rack all the sky, and tear it into shreds,
And shake the air like Titans that have kissed !

XIV.

IN TUSCANY.

DOST thou remember, friend of vanished days,
How in the golden land of love and song,
We met in April in the crowded ways
Of that fair city where the soul is strong,
Aye ! strong as fate, for good or evil praise ?
And how the lord whom all the world obeys,—
The lord of light to whom the stars belong,—
Illumed the track that led thee through the throng ?
Dost thou remember, in the wooded dale,
Beyond the town of Dante the Divine,
How all the air was flooded as with wine ?
And how the lark, to drown the nightingale,
Pealed out sweet notes ? I live to tell the tale.
But thou ? Oblivion signs thee with a sign !

XV.

A HERO.

THE warrior knows how fitful is the fight,—
How sad to live,—how sweet perchance to die.
Is Fame his joy? He meets her on the height,
And when he falls he shouts his battle-cry;
His eyes are wet; our own will not be dry.
Nor shall we stint his praise, or our delight,
When he survives to serve his Land aright
And make his fame the watchword of the sky.
In all our hopes his love is with us still;
He tends our faith, he soothes us when we grieve.
His acts are just; his word we must believe,
And none shall spurn him, though his blood they spill
To pierce the heart whose pride they cannot kill.—
Death dies for him whose fame is his reprieve!

XVI.

REMORSE.

Go, get thee gone. I love thee not, I swear ;

And if I loved thee well in days gone by,

And if I kissed, and trifled with thy hair,

And crowned my love, to prove the same a lie,

My doom is this : my joy was quick to die.

The chain of custom in the drowsy lair

Of some slain vision, is a weight to bear,

And both abhorred it,—thou as well as I.

Ah, God ! 'tis tearful-true ; and I repent ;

And like a dead, live man I live for this :—

To stand, unvalued, on a dream's abyss,

And be mine own most piteous monument.

What ! did I rob thee, Lady, of a kiss ?

There, take it back ; and frown ; and be content !

XVII.

THE MISSION OF THE BARD.

HE is a seer. He wears the wedding-ring
Of Art and Nature ; and his voice is bold.
He should be quicker than the birds to sing,
And filled with frenzy like the men of old
Who sang their songs for country and for king.
Nothing should daunt him, though the news were
told
By fiends from Hell ! He should be swift to hold
And swift to part with truth, as from a spring.
He should discourse of war and war's alarm,
And deeds of peace, and garlands to be sought,
And love, and lore, and death, and beauty's charm,
And warlike men subdued by tender thought,
And grief dismissed, and hatred set at naught,
And Freedom shielded by his strong right arm !

XVIII.

DEATH.

IT is the joy, it is the zest of life,
To know that Death, ungainly to the vile,
Is not a traitor with a reckless knife,
And not a serpent with a look of guile,
But one who greets us with a seraph's smile,—
An angel-guest to tend us after strife,
And keep us true to God when fears are rife
And sceptic thought would daunt us or defile.
He walks the world as one empowered to fill
The fields of space for Father and for Son.
He is our friend, though morbidly we shun
His tender touch,—a cure for every ill.
He is the king of peace, when all is done.
Earth and the air are moulded to his will.

XIX.

TO ONE I LOVE.

OH, let me plead with thee to have a nook,
A garden nook, not far from thy domain,
That there, with harp, and voice, and poet-book,
I may be true to thee, and, passion-fain,
Rehearse the songs of nature once again :—
The songs of Cynthia wandering by the brook
To soothe the raptures of a lover's pain,
And those of Phyllis with her shepherd's crook !
I die to serve thee, and for this alone,—
To be thy bard-elect, from day to day,—
I would forego the right to fill a throne.
I would consent to be the famine-prey
Of some fierce pard, if ere the night were flown
I might subdue thee to my spirit-sway.

XX.

EX TENEBRA.

THE winds have showered their rains upon the sod,
And flowers and trees have murmured as with lips.
The very silence has appealed to God
In man's behalf, though smitten by His rod.

'Twould seem as if the blight of some eclipse
Had dulled the skies,—as if, on mountain tips,
The winds of Heaven had spurned the life terrene,
And clouds were foundering like benighted ships.
But what is this, exultant, unforeseen,
Which cleaves the dark? A fearful, burning thing!

Is it the moon? Or Saturn's scarlet ring
Hurled into space? It is the tempest-sun!

It is the advent of the Phœban king
Which tells the valleys that the storm is done!

XXI.

VICTOR HUGO.

VICTOR the King ! alive to-day, not dead !

Behold, I bring thee with a subject's hand

A poor pale wreath, the best at my command,
But all unfit to deck so grand a head.

It is the outcome of a neighbour land
Denounced of thee, and spurned for many years.
It is the token of a nation's tears

Which oft has joyed in thee, and shall again.

Love for thy hate, applause for thy disdain,—
These are the flowers we spread upon thy hearse.
We give thee back, to-day, thy poet-curse ;

We call thee friend ; we ratify thy reign.
Kings change their sceptres for a funeral stone,
But thou thy tomb hast turned into a throne !

XXII.

CYNTHIA.

O LADY Moon, elect of all the spheres
To be the guardian of the ocean-tides,
I charge thee, say, by all thy hopes and fears,
And by thy face, the oracle of brides,
Why evermore Remorse with thee abides?
Is life a bane to thee, and fraught with tears,
That thus forlorn and sad thou dost confer
With ghosts and shades? Perchance thou dost
aspire
To bridal honours, and thy Phœbus-sire
Forbids the banns, whoe'er thy suitor be?
Is this thy grievance, O thou chief of nuns?
Or dost thou weep to know that Jupiter
Hath many moons—his daughters and his sons—
And Earth, thy mother, only one in thee?

XXIII.

PHILOMEL.

Lo, as a minstrel at the court of Love,
The nightingale, who knows his mate is nigh,
Thrills into rapture ; and the stars above
Look down, affrighted, as they would reply.
There is contagion, and I know not why,
In all this clamour, all this fierce delight,
As if the sunset, when the day did swoon,
Had drawn some wild confession from the moon.
Have wrongs been done ? Have crimes enacted been
To shame the weird retirement of the night ?
O clamorous bird ! O sad, sweet nightingale !
Withhold thy voice, and blame not Beauty's queen.
She may be pure, though dumb : and she is pale,
And wears a radiance on her brow serene.

XXIV.

THE SONNET KING.

O PETRARCH ! I am here. I bow to thee,
Great king of sonnets, thronèd long ago,
And lover-like, as Love enjoineth me,
And miser-like, enamoured of my woe,
I reckon up my teardrops as they flow.
I would not lose the power to shed a tear
For all the wealth of Plutus and his reign.
I would not be so base as not complain
When she I love is absent from my sight,
No, not for all the marvels of the night,
And all the varying splendours of the year.
Do thou assist me, thou ! that art the light
Of all true lovers' souls, in all the sphere,
To make a May-time of my sorrows slain.

XXV.

TOKEN FLOWERS.

OH, not the daisy, for the love of God !
Take not the daisy ! Let it bloom apace,—
Untouched alike by splendour or disgrace
Of party feud ! Its stem is not a rod ;
And no one fears, or hates it, on the sod.
It laughs, exultant, in the Morning's face,
And everywhere doth fill a lowly place,
Though fraught with favours for the darkest clod.
'Tis said the primrose is a party flower,
And means coercion, and the coy renown
Of one who toiled for country and for crown.
But, in the circuit of my Lady's bower,
It means content, a hope, a golden hour.
Primroses smile ; and daisies cannot frown !

XXVI.

A VETERAN POET.

I KNEW thee first as one may know the fame
Of some apostle,—as a man may know
The mid-day sun far-shining o'er the snow.
I hailed thee prince of poets ! I became
Vassal of thine, and warmed me at the flame
Of thy pure thought, my spirit all aglow
With dreams of peace, and pomp, and lyric show,
And all the splendours, Master ! of thy name.
But now, a man revealed,—a guide for men,—
I see thy face and clasp thee by the hand ;
And though the Muses in thy presence stand,
There's room for me to loiter in thy ken.
O lordly soul ! O wizard of the pen !
What news from God ? What word from Fairyland ?

XXVII.

A PRAYER FOR ENGLAND.

AH, fair Lord God of Heaven, to whom we call,—
By whom we live,—on whom our hopes are built,—
Do Thou, from year to year, e'en as Thou wilt,
Control the Realm, but suffer not to fall
Its ancient faith, its grandeur, and its thrall !
Do Thou preserve it, in the hours of guilt,
When foemen thirst for blood that should be spilt,
And keep it strong when traitors would appal.
Uphold us still, O God ! and be the screen
And sword and buckler of our England's might,
That foemen's wiles, and woes which intervene,
May fade away, as fades a winter's night.
Thine ears have heard us, and Thine eyes have seen.
Wilt Thou not help us, Lord ! to find the Light ?

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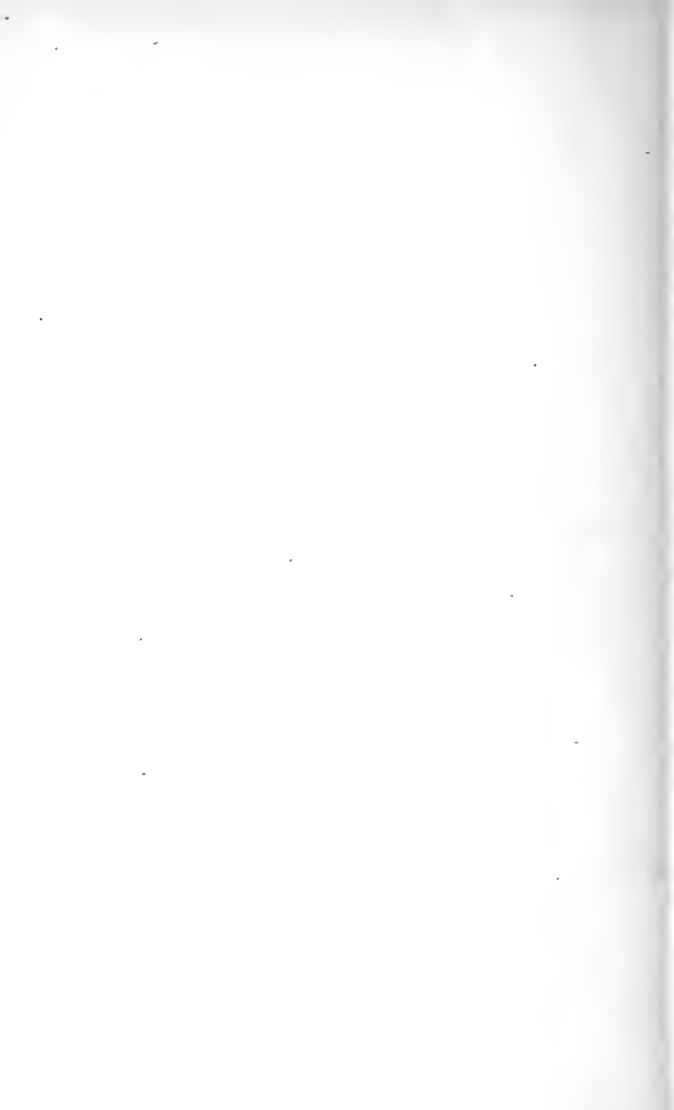
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